Roland Boer

# Socialism in Power

## On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance

Springer

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*For Yang Huilin, my wise mentor*

# Preface

This monograph concerns the historical development—in practice and theory—of governance in socialist systems. Some years ago now, I began to think of a work that would deal systematically with this question, since there is now more than a century of concrete experience and its associated theoretical reflection. The vastness of the task, however, soon became apparent. On the way, I found myself needing to develop some aspects of the project. The study of Engels became a monograph, entitled *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Springer 2021). I also realised that the developments in China required in-depth research and another separate work, which became *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners* (Springer 2021). With these tasks completed, I could finally return to the original task. This book is the result.

The book seeks to bring together the historical realities of socialist systems of governance and its associated theoretical reflection, which is framed by the Marxist tradition. In that light, I begin with analyses of the works of Marx and Engels. This is the task of the opening two chapters, in which I emphasise in particular the influence of Engels in establishing the basic principles of socialist governance. From here, I devote three chapters to the Soviet Union, which was the first country in human history to experience socialism in power. The second half of the book moves to East Asia, with an initial chapter devoted to the DPRK (North Korea), before focusing in the remaining chapters on China, which arguably has the most developed form of socialist governance.

From this research, it has become abundantly clear that the form of governance that emerged after proletarian revolutions was and is unlike any other form that has hitherto appeared. This new form is not a version of the Western European “nation-state,” not an empire or colonising power, and not a federation. This book in one respect is an examination of what exactly this new form is. Further, there are still too few works available in English that provide a fair assessment of the experiences of socialism in power. The main reason for such a scarcity of English language works is the imposition of a Western liberal framework, and thus the model of the Western capitalist nation-state, on socialist development. Such a model is an ill-fit indeed for countries with very different histories, cultures, and traditions of governance. This Western liberal model has also influenced a few too many

Western Marxist dismissals—for reasons too many to enumerate here—of any actual experience of socialism in power. By contrast, the works that do seek to understand socialism in power on its own terms are still relatively few. I have, of course, made use of the few works that do so, but my primary sources throughout are from the countries in question.

Over the years, I have benefited from many discussions, debates, and feedback on earlier efforts related to this book. Many are comrades, colleagues, and friends in China who have contributed directly and indirectly to the present work. I think particularly of Yang Huilin, who has been a wise and extraordinary mentor in China for a long time now. Also at the Renmin University of China are Zang Fengyu and Zhang Jing, my old friends. Thanks also to Hong Xiaonan, Fang Yumei, Qu Hong, and Song Liang at Dalian University of Technology's School of Marxism. Not to be neglected are the fine scholars at the Academy of Marxism, within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Deng Chundong, Wang Zhongbao, and Liu Zixu are just a few among many. They have provided invaluable feedback, especially when I thought I knew much but actually knew very little, as well as opportunities to present papers and publications in journals. I would also like to thank someone who has become my editor at the Beijing office of Springer: Leanna Li is the epitome of professionalism and efficiency.

In Australia, I thank Colin Mackerras and have valued his immense knowledge and experience of China. Tamara Prosic has debated with me many aspects of developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as has Roger Markwick with regard to the early days of the Soviet Union. I am also deeply grateful to comrades in the Communist Party of Australia, for their lively interest in and engagement with some of the topics discussed here. At the risk of leaving out names, I will not name them here, but they know very well who they are. Among colleagues in Europe, Yiannis Kokosalakis has been invaluable in relation to worker democracy in the Soviet Union, having made available his groundbreaking work (on which I rely in Chaps. 3 and 5) before publication. In relation to the DPRK, Keith Bennett's suggestions have been invaluable in light of his immense and long-standing experience of the country. Stefano Azzarà has urged me to appreciate more than I often do what is actually beneficial from the Western tradition, and Antonis Balasopoulos has pushed me to think through the philosophical implications of the communist project. I also thank Hannes

Fellner and Marc Püschel, from among a fine younger generation of Austrian and German Marxist scholars, as well as Kaan Kangal, who works at Nanjing University. Finally, the one who knows most about this work, as I do of hers, is Christina Petterson, for whom I thank for the many years now of working on our common project.

**Roland Boer**
**Toongabbie East**
**May 2022**

# Abbreviations

*BRI* Belt and Road Initiative

*CPC* Communist Party of China

*CPPCC* Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

*DPRK* Democratic People's Republic of Korea

*HKSAR* Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

*NBS* National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC

*NPC* National People's Congress

*PLA* People's Liberation Army

*PPP* Primary Party Organisations

*PRC* People's Republic of China

*SAC* State Affairs Committee of the DPRK

*SAR* Special Administrative Region

*SCIO* State Council Information Office of the PRC

*SPA* Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK

*TCM* Traditional Chinese Medicine

*WPK* Workers' Party of Korea

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# 1. Introduction

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The primary task of this introduction is to provide an overview of the argument as a whole. As mentioned, my concern is the practice and theory of socialist governance, which now has a history of more than a century. Some crucial features of the way this study is framed need to be highlighted. First, there is a qualitative difference between a Communist Party seeking power through revolutionary processes and the actual exercise of power. As Lenin observed, gaining power through a proletarian revolution is relatively easy; seeking to construct socialism after taking power is exponentially more complicated. Hence the title of the book, *Socialism in Power*. Second, the tradition of socialist governance is a living tradition, a constant work in progress. It is neither a given, which one can know in advance, nor unchangeable. Third, the agenda for this work in progress is set by the Marxist method. This last point should be obvious, but it needs to be emphasised: the agenda is not set by Western liberal criticisms, but by the Marxist method itself in relation to the developments of socialist governance. By Marxist method I mean Marxism-Leninism as a guide for socialist construction. In this light, there is an important distinction—common in China and elsewhere—between basic principles and specific judgements made in light of specific circumstances. Obviously, the latter are not permanent, but are determined by specific cultural traditions, histories, and problems that need to be solved. What about the basic principles? These remain, but they are not immutable, unchangeable

in time and place and simply applied. Instead, they undergo a process of innovation and development, being enriched in the process.

Why do I use the term “socialist governance” and not, for example, socialist politics or the socialist state? The reason arises from my earlier study of Engels, who argued that any form of the state is a separated public power, with the state in constant tension with and indeed alienated from society. He proposed that in a socialist system a public power would be enmeshed within society, and thus not be a “state” in the sense in which he defined it. That said, from Lenin onwards, we do begin to find the terminology of a “proletarian state” and “socialist state,” albeit with the crucial qualifier that it is “entirely new” and “without precedent in history.” The emphasis here is on a qualitatively different type of state, one in which urban and rural workers are masters through the Communist Party and the state is enmeshed within society. In the relevant chapters, I do study this development, although my preference—influenced by Engels—is for the terminology of socialist governance. I am also influenced by a country I know rather well: China. For example, the three core volumes by Xi Jinping have the English title, *The Governance of China.* The Chinese is 谈治国理政 *Tan zhiguolizheng*, talking about the “management of state affairs’ or “governing a country.”

I am well aware of the limitations of this work. While I deal with Marx and Engels, the Soviet Union, DPRK, and China, there are many other contexts—from Eastern Europe, through other countries in East Asia, to Latin America and Africa—that are very worthy of study concerning developments of socialist governance, no matter whether the time-frame is shorter or longer. But such a task would require many volumes, the work of other specialists, and is beyond the scope of this work.

Given the nature of publications in our time, I provide here a synopsis of the remaining chapters in the book.

*Chapter* 2: *Marx’s Ambivalence: State, Proletarian Dictatorship and Commune*

This chapter concerns what Marx had to say concerning hitherto existing forms of the state and what might happen to the state under socialism in power, after a communist revolution. The chapter is divided into four sections, the first of which deals briefly with Marx’s observations on

hitherto existing forms of the state. The second section turns to my main concern, which is what happens after a proletarian revolution. Here I deal with the dictatorship of the proletariat—a term coined by Marx and defended (as we shall see in the next chapter) assiduously by Engels. The third section deals with the commune, based on the experiment in Paris in 1871. The material on the proletarian dictatorship and the commune raises a number of problems, which Marx did not solve and indeed left for Engels to seek a solution. The final section focuses on Marx's fascinating struggle in trying to deal with forms of governance under communism. That he realised such governance is necessary is clear, but that he was also reticent to spell it out in detail is also obvious—not least because he knew that he did not have the experience and thereby evidence to undertake a scientific study of what happens to the state under communism.

*Chapter* 3: *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*

In this chapter, I summarise the argument of an earlier monograph on this topic (*Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*, Springer 2021), since it was actually Engels who provided the basic principles for what socialist governance might be. The chapter begins with a summary of Engels's well-known theory of forms of the state that had existed thus far, which may be formulated in terms of the state as a "separated public power." Of more pertinence for socialist construction are his subsequent proposals. These begin with the explicit identification (not found in Marx) of the Paris commune as the dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as the important role of "force [*Gewalt*]" in the initial exercise of proletarian power. Engels also sought to clarify the crucial theory of the "dying away of the state." In response to the Anarchists, who proposed that the first act of socialist power would be the "abolition [*Abschaffung*]" of the state, Engels emphasised that the state would die away of its own accord as one of the last results of socialism in power. It would not happen quickly, but would take a long time indeed. The final part of the chapter elaborates on Engels's principles of socialist governance. These are: (1) Public power (*Gewalt*) continues, although it would not be separated from but stand in the midst of society; (2) Since it is not based on class conflict, it would lose its "political character"; (3) Governance entails the administration of things and the management of the processes of production for the sake of the true

interests of society; (4) This reality may be seen as a dialectical transformation, an *Aufhebung* of baseline communism.

*Chapter* 4: *Lenin: Before and After October*

Lenin occupies a unique position, since he experienced both seeking power and exercising power, both the struggle before October and the difficulties of socialist construction after October—albeit too briefly. The chapter is structured around this threshold. It begins with Lenin's pre-October reflections on the state, democracy, and what forms governance might take after a proletarian revolution. At this stage, Lenin was restricted to interpreting the texts primarily of Engels but also Marx, along with the experiences of revolutionary struggle. The second section provides an overview of the practical experiences of the early days of Soviet power, identifying the transitions towards institutionalisation, leadership of the Communist Party, and socialist democracy. The third section examines Lenin's theoretical deliberations on what was happening, seeking to discern the shape of socialist governance in light of rapidly developing conditions. Here, I address—through close attention to "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power"—the leadership of the Communist Party, including leadership over and training of the masses of workers and peasants, the need for iron discipline, and the concomitant development of worker democracy. I also address developments in the theory of socialist democracy as the highest form of democracy, and the concept of democratic centralism—which would come to have profound influence in the communist tradition. I close by asking what has happened to the state as—following Engels—a separated public power, and identify the unexpected beginning of a long process of the state's "dying away" from the first moments of the proletarian revolution.

*Chapter* 5: *The Soviet Union as a Multi-National and Anti-Colonial State*

Lenin had only a few years to experience the actual practice of socialist governance, so he was able to see only its nascent forms beginning to emerge. It was in the context of Stalin's long tenure that real developments took place on the ground. These three decades, from the early 1920s to 1953, constitute one of the most formative periods for socialist governance. Given its importance, I devote two chapters to the topic. The present

chapter deals with the central role of multiple—and especially minority—nationalities in the structures of socialist governance. It begins specifying why we should use “nationality” and not “ethnic group,” and outlines the debates among Marxist parties at the turn of the twentieth century—especially those in Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Caucasus. Stalin’s deeply influential essay, “Marxism and the National Question” of 1913, was a response to these debates. In this essay, he argues against the proposal that “cultural-national autonomy” should be the determining feature of a federated socialist country; instead, class should be the unifying feature, so much so that the totalising unity of class would provide a more genuine and comprehensive foundation for fostering hitherto unexpected levels of diversity. It was precisely on this principle that the world’s first comprehensive policy for minority nationalities was developed in the Soviet Union after 1917. After providing some detail concerning these policies, the chapter then examines how this focus on many nationalities within the Soviet Union led to a crucial insight: in the same way that the liberation of nationalities was enabled through the October Revolution, so also should colonised peoples seek liberation through anti-colonial struggles of national liberation. The final part of the chapter examines how this insight developed in the 1920s, and how it was enacted through the many dimensions of assistance to and indeed fostering of national liberation movements throughout the world. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the internal problem generated in the Soviet Union with the constitutional right for autonomous republics to secede, and how subsequent socialist countries have not followed this example.

*Chapter* 6: *Soviet Democracy and a “Socialist State”*

This chapter focuses on how the basic features of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union began to emerge in the 1920s and especially 1930s. There are four features: (1) the first and faltering attempts to promote electoral democracy, and especially the campaign for universal, multi-candidate, and contested elections in the later 1930s; (2) the substantial and abiding contribution to consultative democracy through the primary party organisations (PPOs) in the workplace, collective farm, and neighbourhood; (3) in relation to the 1936 constitution, the identification of freedom from exploitation (and thus socio-economic well-being) as a core human right,

along with proactive and substantive rights; (4) and the inescapable and dialectical role of the leadership of the Communist Party in socialist democracy. These features would come to be developed much further by other socialist countries. The chapter also deals with the increasing usage of the term “socialist state,” as a qualitatively different form of the state. The concern here is with Stalin’s reflections in response to debates concerning the state’s withering away, and his identification in an all-important speech to the eighteenth congress of 1939 of a second stage of socialism in which socialist state structures have attained relative maturity and stability. After summing up the features of such a “socialist state,” I address the contradiction in which the terminology of “socialist state” began to the deployed precisely when it was becoming clearer that the distinction between state and society was blurring and could no longer be applied. In short, the organs of governance were increasingly standing—as Engels already suggested—in the midst of society.

*Chapter 7*: *The “Korean Style” of Socialist Governance in the DPRK*

With a focus on the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), this chapter signals the move to East Asia. Of potential case studies for analysis, who do I focus on the DPRK? Not only is it the most enduring of all the socialist countries, but it has also been the target of the greatest amount of Western caricatures and misrepresentations. In this case, it needs to emphasised even more that the agenda should not be set by external criticisms but by those who actually know about the DPRK’s system. My primary sources are Korean scholars, as well as a handful of observers who have actually visited the country and studied it carefully (as I have done on two research visits to the country). What do we find? The DPRK reveals significant continuity in governance and political theory to other socialist countries, while at the same time revealing distinct emphases in its “Korean style.”

The bulk of the chapter presents details on the practices of socialist governance, after providing some historical background to the emergence of the DPRK’s governing structures. First is electoral democracy, which is embodied in the interaction between the people’s assemblies and the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland. The Democratic Front includes all political parties, mass organisations, and religious groups, and it is here that multiple candidates for elections are put forward, debated,

and selected. Only then do elections of the proposed candidates take place for the people's assemblies, including the Supreme People's Assembly, which is the highest legislative body in the country. The second is consultative democracy, where the mass line comes to the fore. I analyse in some detail the Chongsanri method in agriculture and the Taean work system in industry—both named after the places where they were first developed. These methods entail a dialectical approach: the greater the substantive involvement of collective farmers and shop-floor workers in problem-solving and realistic planning, the more significant is the ownership and implementation of decisions and plans by the Party committees and planning commissions. The third concerns the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea, and here I use the example of the State Affairs Commission (SAC). The country's leader is the chair of the SAC (but not of the SPA and its Standing Committee), which has significant and wide-reaching powers. How does the SAC relate to the whole system of socialist democracy in the DPRK? It is accountable to the SPA, and the whole system, as one scholar puts it, "regulates the order in which the state power is established and exercised." In other words, the significant power of the SAC requires not merely a high level of accountability, but also a robust system of statutory processes through which the WPK leads.

The final part of the chapter provides an overview of political theory. Formally, this theory is embodied in three terms: *Juche*, or a people-first philosophy in which the masses are masters of their destiny through the struggles of revolutionary construction, independence, and self-sufficiency; *Songun*, which arose in response to the immense challenges of the 1990s, and identifies the military as the prime revolutionary force that is able to drive economic recovery and preserve sovereignty; *Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism*, as an integrated whole that is notably people-centred, emphasising the creativity of the masses and the concern with improving everyday lives of common people. The chapter closes with some considerations on the unity of opposites (the terminology comes from dialectical materialism), with the unity in practice and ideology running through all levels of society and state—or, as the Chondoist-inspired slogan puts it, "believe in the people as in heaven."

*Chapter* 8: *China's Whole Process People's Democracy*

This chapter focuses on a speech by Xi Jinping from late 2021, concerning "whole process people's democracy [全过程人民民主 *quan guocheng renmin minzhu*]." It begins with an overview of the development of socialist democracy in China from the beginnings with the anti-colonial struggle of the nineteenth century, through Mao Zedong's new democracy, democratic dictatorship, and democratic centralism, to the full panoply of components that were established during the reform and opening-up. The main concern is to identify the emphases in developing socialist democracy from the time of the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012 and then the tasks at hand today. There are three main features that arise from this material.

First is the importance of the mass line as the foundation of people's democracy, along with explicating the meaning of the "people's heart" or "people's will" in a socialist context, and the crucial role of democratic supervision. All of this may be seen in terms of "the people as masters of the country [为人民当家作主 *renmin dangia zuozhu*]." The second concerns a signature emphasis of Xi Jinping's tenure as general secretary: developing further a comprehensive rule of law. On this topic, I provide a brief background to socialist rule of law, before dealing with the project of strengthening the constitution and the need for a robust and constantly updated legal system that focuses on incorporating the virtuous or "good laws [善法 *shanfa*]" that are necessary for a socialist legal system. Third is the leadership of the Communist Party, without which socialist democracy would not exist. Here I focus on the development of rule-of-law "statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*]" through which the Party's proposals become the will of the people, and how Xi Jinping has ensured the development of democratic centralism for country-wide governance. The conclusion to the chapter seeks to define socialist democracy in light of these three topics as a dialectical conjunction of Communist Party leadership and the people as masters of the country, mediated through the full range or "whole process [全过程 *quan guocheng*]" of democratic and rule-of-law statutory procedures. I also ask how democracy may be evaluated in any of its forms. A final note: this chapter is theoretical, but the three main topics—people's will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—will form the topics for case studies in the next three chapters.

*Chapter 9: The People's Will: Stability, Safety, and Harmony in Xinjiang*

Arising from the three main themes of the previous chapter—people's will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—this chapter provides a case study relating to the people's heart or will as an inescapable feature of socialist democracy. It does so by focusing on a distinctive feature of China's socialist system in terms of the political and cultural assumptions of stability, safety, and harmony, and then analysing the situation in relation to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The first part provides an overview of the semantic fields of stability, safety, and harmony, and then pays more extensive attention to an important CPC Central Committee document from 2006, entitled *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society*. Coming in the wake of the "wild 90s," the *Decision* analyses the many contradictions that had arisen and provides a full-spectrum policy response that has particular relevance for the many problems in Xinjiang.

The second part of the chapter tackles the situation in Xinjiang, in light of personal experience and scholarship. It begins with a presentation of two geographical features with immense strategic, political, and economic significance: the Hu Huanyong Line and the Hexi Corridor. This material sets the context for an overview of the historical development of the preferential policies for minority nationalities (the Uyghur nationality is one of 55 in China), after which I deal with the main emphases of these policies in terms of culture, education, governance, and economic development. The latter in particular had until recently lagged considerably in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where poverty still remained a distinct problem in remote and rural areas. This leads me to deal with the Marxist approach to human rights, for which the core right is socio-economic well-being and common prosperity. The residual poverty in Xinjiang had provided opportunities for the spread of Islamic radicalism in the 1990s, leading to a rise in terrorism, extremism, and separatism. The response has two related steps: first, a resolute focus in restoring stability, safety, and harmony through anti-terrorist and deradicalisation measures; tackling the root cause in terms of economic development, improved job training and opportunities, and education. Here I also address the patterns of growth of Xinjiang's population and the improved choices available to educated and working Uyghur women, as well as the profound effect of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has enabled Xinjiang at last to overcome absolute poverty and set out on the road to common prosperity. Only on the basis of

high-quality and balanced development are stability, safety, and harmony possible in the long term.

*Chapter* 10: *Governing the Country According to Law: The Case of the Hong Kong Storm*

The second case study that arises from my treatment in chapter eight concerns the rule of law, with a particular focus on the Hong Kong National Security Law that was promulgated in June 2020 and came into effect at the beginning of 2021. I do not see the need to reprise my earlier treatments of rule of law itself, so will address directly the situation of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). The chapter begins with an overview of the longer history of Hong Kong as a part of China stolen by the British Empire in the nineteenth century and its development as a trade hub—of all manner of commodities legal and illegal—and use as a lever to destabilise the rest of China, economically, politically, and culturally (through religious missionaries). The second part deals with the long and complex negotiations of the 1980s and 1990s concerning Hong Kong's long overdue return to the mainland, with an emphasis on the continual obstructions by the British imperial negotiators. This leads to treatment of the innovative "one country, two systems" solution proposed by Deng Xiaoping, with reference to three SARs, in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan island. Next, I move to the structural and economic problems of Hong Kong SAR since 1997, which developed a warped economy characterised by oligopoly capitalism, vast income disparities, sluggish economic growth, a polarised political landscape, and an educational system that sought to promote decaying Western liberal assumptions.

These compound problems and tensions provided the causes of the "Hong Kong storm [风波 *fengbo*]" that burst forth in 2019–2020, with unrest, riots, violence, and widespread destruction. This was also fanned by foreign interference that sought—once again—to use Hong Kong SAR as a destabilising lever, now in terms of a "colour counter-revolution." The final part focuses on the comprehensive analysis and measures taken, including economic, political, educational, and media reform, although my particular concern is with the Hong Kong National Security Law itself. This was a comprehensive rule-of-law solution to the immediate problems, and, with effective implementation, brought the unrest to a rapid end. The conclusion

considers the longer term goals of Hong Kong SAR's democratic reforms and economic development, and indicates that the pioneering project of "one country, two systems" has already gained valuable experience for the time when Taiwan island too becomes a special administrative region.

*Chapter* 11: *Party Building: Strengthening the Construction of a Marxist Party*

The final case study that arises from chapter eight concerns Party building, which is a key feature of effective leadership by the Communist Party. For a Party of almost 100 million members, the level of organisation for such an active Communist Party is beyond the imagination for those who live in countries with populations smaller than even the CPC. Building and strengthening the Party, improving its theoretical knowledge in Marxism, leading on all fronts, building honest and clean governance, ensuring deep links with the masses, engaging actively with and deeply involved in communities and workplaces—these and many more are the tasks and responsibilities of Party branches. The resources for these tasks are also immense, so I need to be selective.

In this chapter, my interest is in local or grassroots Party branches, since these are the foundation of the whole Party: "Attaching importance to and strengthening the construction of Party branches is the distinctive feature of a Marxist party." The first part analyses in some detail the *Regulations for the Work of Branches of the Communist Party of China*, which was issued in trial form in 2018 and is currently undergoing comprehensive testing and the gathering of feedback from concrete experience. While providing an overview of the *Regulations*, I am particularly interested in five topics: (a) the dialectical nature of Party branches, in the sense that resolute and unified adherence to the Central Committee is coupled with full-scale democratic practices, energy, and creativity; (b) the ten types of Party branches, which require some explanation and occasionally draws on personal experience; (c) the tasks and responsibilities of such branches, especially since the *Regulations* signalled a root-and-branch renewal of the base-level, the very foundations of the CPC; (d) comprehensive democratic practices, in terms of elections, consultation, and democratic supervision that has a "spicy taste"; (e) and the increased responsibilities of Party branch secretaries, which I leave for a separate section later in the chapter.

The second section of the chapter selects one type of grassroots Party branch out of a large number: the enterprise Party branch. I do so by drawing on the immense resources at the premier site, 党建 *Dangjian*, which simply means *Party Building*. After a brief overview of the site's content and structure, I begin by analysing some examples of branches in non-public enterprises, before turning to the comprehensive Marxist educational activities of grassroots branches in state-owned enterprises. Since the centenary of the CPC was celebrated on 1 July, 2021, the material I have researched primarily concerns historical study and activities in a number of different branches. The final topic of this section deals with the fact that the working masses—industrial workers, miners, railway employees, and so on—are the members of enterprise branches, and that a major responsibility concerns the well-being of the staff and working masses in the enterprise.

The third and fourth sections concern the Party branch secretary and the role of trade unions. The branch secretary is a major concern of the *Regulations*, but I have held the treatment to this point since there has been a distinct focus on improving the skills and qualities of such secretaries. After dealing with the *Regulations* on this matter, I turn to two insightful pieces, the first of which identifies the main problems that arose from appraisals of branch secretaries and the solutions in terms of identifying potential secretaries, nurturing and training them, and assisting branch secretaries in the many tasks of theoretical improvement, engagement with production and decision-making in the enterprise, and assisting branch members in all respects. The other study is an anonymous first-hand account of a new Party branch secretary and the challenging tasks of renewing and growing the branch. The final section of the chapter broaches the topic of trade unions in a socialist system, especially since such a role is somewhat more difficult to understand for those who are accustomed to the antagonistic nature of class-based struggles in capitalist systems. Here, I draw on a key document from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, which should be a must-read text for all who are interested in the topic.

*Chapter* 12: *Conclusion: On Communism and the Common Good*

The concluding chapter draws together the main insights that have arisen through this study, stressing the continuities and identifying the new

developments. In doing so, I emphasise a number of points. First, it is clear that governance and the common good are inescapably connected. But how is the common good to be understood? For the Marxist tradition, and indeed for cultures in East Asia, the common good is primarily social, and it is only through the social that the individual may flourish. Second, how can the common good be fostered? The answer, from the history I have examined, is a strong and active state, albeit not one in the traditional sense. As Losurdo has pointed out, this reality arose from contexts of either failed-state conditions (Russia) or anti-colonial struggles for national liberation (Asia, but also Africa). In these contexts the state continues to be seen positively, as a vital feature of all dimensions of socialist construction. Third, the reality of socialist political systems is an ongoing one. This should be obvious, but unlike the half century of stagnation of Western nation-states, the nature of socialist governance is a work in process, a constantly elaborated and renewing tradition. It is in this sense that one may begin to understand the increasing confidence in countries such as China that the socialist political system has not merely a latent superiority in comparison to capitalist political systems, but that this latency is now becoming apparent and is being realised.

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# 2. Marx on the State, Proletarian Dictatorship and Commune

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## 2.1 Opening Remarks

The analysis of socialism in power must begin with Marx, even though we will find in the next chapter that Engels had far more to say on this question, especially in dealing with the problems Marx was unable to solve. Indeed, the focus of this chapter is an unresolved contradiction in Marx's thought concerning what would happen to state power after a proletarian revolution. This is the contradiction between the proletarian dictatorship and the commune. To put it sharply, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be centralising, taking control of the forces of production and comprehensively reshaping economics and society, and using strong and repressive measures to deal with the former ruling class and the inevitable counter-revolution; the commune, by contrast, was to be decentralising, was opposed to repressive "state power," and is imagined to be a free association of equal workers.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. After a brief presentation of Marx's thought on hitherto existing forms of the state, I focus mostly on how Marx wrote of both the proletarian dictatorship and the commune, and how he offered a number of tentative suggestions as to how this contradiction might be resolved. In closing, I give detailed attention to Marx's fascinating struggle in dealing with the forms of governance under

communism. He clearly realised that such governance is necessary, but he was also reticent to spell it out in detail. Why? He knew very well that he did not have the experience and thereby evidence to undertake a scientific study of what happens to the state under communism.

A final introductory observation: by and large, studies of Marx's theory of the state—insofar as it can be pieced together—focus overwhelmingly on the capitalist state. While this is an understandable tendency in light of Marx's economic studies of capitalism, it also constitutes a retreat. Apart from an occasional sentence evoking Marx's somewhat euphoric description of the Paris Commune, there is very little indeed concerning what Marx had to say about the state after a proletarian revolution, let alone what governance in a socialist system might be. The reasons for such a retreat are many, but they are not my concern here (Losurdo 2008; 2017). Instead, my interest is precisely on what Marx had to say about socialist governance, about socialism in power.

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## 2.2 Hitherto Existing Forms of the State

Marx's observations on forms of the state that have appeared in human history may be summarised in five key points, most of which would come to be developed more fully in the later work of Engels (see the next chapter).

### 2.2.1 Key Points on Earlier State Forms

First, the state is a product of the economic realities of mode of production, private property, division of labour and especially classes and class conflict. Although Marx describes this ground as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois society)[1] in the critique of Hegel,[2] already by the first rough outline of historical materialism in *The German Ideology* (1846a, 33–34, 311; 1846b, 46–47, 329), a class-based economic analysis emerges.[3] In sum, hitherto existing forms of the state are the products of class struggle, which would become a core Marxist position.

Second, the dominant class determines the nature of the state. This determination may be more direct, as the Manifesto puts it: the "executive of the modern State is but a committee [*Ausschuß*] for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx and Engels 1848a, 464; 1848b, 487).[4] Or the determination may be indirect, since the class in

question may not be—due to internal contradictions and tensions—always in immediate control. Yet this class's systemic framework sets the terms for all acts and policies. This emphasis comes to the fore particularly in Marx's analysis in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," where he observes that while Louis Napoleon was trying to break the bourgeoisie's political power, at the same time "by protecting their material power, he generates anew their public and political power" (Marx 1852a, 186; 1852d, 194).[5] I will have more to say on this study by Marx below, but we may note here the way working-class political parties within capitalist systems must inevitably conform to the structures of the capitalist state already established by the bourgeoisie.

Third, the state is separated from and relates to society in an antagonistic manner. This position already appears in the critique of Hegel: "In short, he [Hegel] presents everywhere the conflict between bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft]* and the state" (Marx 1843b, 80; 1843a, 73). Throughout the study of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Marx emphasises this point again and again, coming to focus—especially in "On the Jewish Question"—on the internalisation of this struggle in terms of the tension between being a private individual and the citizen of a state (Marx 1844e, 148–149, 161–163; 1844d, 153–154, 167–168; see also 1843b, 86–87, 119; 1843a, 77–78, 109).

Related is the fourth point: since the state is separated from bourgeois society (by which Marx meant economic and social forces), the state has a degree of autonomy that varies in light of specific conditions. This autonomy is may be encapsulated in two observations, one concerning the French absolute monarchy as an "executive power [*Exekutivgewalt*], with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation" that had complex forms of representation and transformation (Marx 1852a, 178; 1852d, 185), and the other concerning bourgeois or "vulgar democracy" as the "last form of state of bourgeois society [*bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*]" in which "the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion" (Marx 1875c, 22; 1875a, 96).

These points may be summarised in a sentence or two: hitherto existing forms of the state have arisen from the socio-economic realities of class struggle and are determined by the class in power; these forms of the state are separated from, have various degrees of autonomy from, and relate antagonistically with society (bourgeois society in the case of the capitalist state). These points are quite well known and I see no need to elaborate

further, despite the tendency of Marxist analyses in Western contexts to restrict analysis to the capitalist or bourgeois state (Miliband 1965; Jessop 1978; 1982, 1–31).

### 2.2.2 Historical Emergence of the Bourgeois State

Of more interest here is the fact that Marx has a preference for historical narratives, each of which has its own variations. Yet all of these historical accounts seek to show how the bourgeoisie came to dominate the new state form in Europe.

The first example appears in "On the Jewish Question," with its manifold dialectical turns and intriguing historical shifts. The immediate context is Marx's response to Bruno Bauer's claim that "political emancipation" would be achieved when people have dispensed with their particular religious claims, when the "Christian state" was abolished and a thoroughly secular and atheistic state established (Bauer 1843a; 1843b). Marx replies by arguing that the "Christian state"—the final form of the absolutist state after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815)—does not disappear with the secular bourgeois state, but that the bourgeois state is the full dialectical realisation of the "Christian state." In order to make this point, Marx turns not to France or elsewhere in Europe, but to the United States of America. A curious move, since the United States never experienced the absolutist state, let alone the final phase of the latter as the "Christian state" (Boer 2019). It may have begun as a white supremacist racial state, based on genocide and slavery (Losurdo 2008), but an absolutist state in the European sense it was not. Marx's move may well be due to the fact that United States was seen by many in Europe as a harbinger of the future, precisely because it did not seem to have a history comparable to Europe. Marx is not so enthused, pointing out that in the United States religion had become a private affair, exercised by any citizen while the state itself was ostensibly secular. This is the full resolution of the contradictions of the absolutist "Christian state," which is actually not Christian at all. Instead, the fully realised Christian state is "the *atheistic* state, the *democratic* state, the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of bourgeois society [*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*]" (Marx 1844e, 151; 1844d, 156). Or as *The Holy Family* puts it, "the politically perfected, modern state that knows no religious privileges is also

the fully developed *Christian* state" (Marx and Engels 1845a, 117–118; 1845b, 111).

A second and relatively brief example appears in *The German Ideology*, although here we move into territory that was to become Engels's forté (see the next chapter). The narrative here suggests that the state may have been relatively independent under feudal or absolutist forms, and it remained so to an unprecedented level in the hybrid situation in Prussia of that time due to the inability of one class to attain dominance. As the bourgeoisie slowly gained wealth and power, and as the state became increasingly indebted, the state lost its independence and became subject to the bourgeoisie—and so a bourgeois state (Marx and Engels 1846a, 178, 344–345; 1846b, 195, 361). Third is the relatively brief account in the "Manifesto," which provides greater complexity concerning the various alliances undertaken by the European bourgeoisie as its power grew. Originally oppressed under feudalism, it began to achieve self-governance in scattered medieval communes or in urban republics. Then, it moved to being a "third estate" (French monarchy) and "cornerstone" of absolute monarchies, in opposition to the nobility. Only with a world capitalist market was the bourgeoisie able to conquer "exclusive political sway" through the "modern representative State," which now manages its common affairs (Marx and Engels 1848a, 464; 1848b, 486).

The longest account appears in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," where Marx argues that that the bourgeoisie does not need to exercise direct power to promote its agenda. It can gain and lose parliamentary control, or act as an executive for a late imperial pretender (Louis Napoleon) who was an apparent champion of the peasants and "lumpenproletariat," while at the same ensuring that the form of the state that emerged secured the growth of capital and profit. At a crucial moment, the opposition between state power and society becomes crystal clear, and this is when the bourgeoisie can achieve its goal. Marx describes this eventual achievement—riven with contradictions—as the "unlimited despotism of one class over other classes," the interweaving in closest fashion of the "extensive state machine" with the "material interests of the French bourgeoisie," and the "centralisation of the state that modern society requires" (Marx 1852a, 105, 132, 185; 1852d, 111, 139, 193).[6]

The final example appears in "The Civil War in France," in a section where Marx attempts to provide some background for the Paris commune.

Here he writes specifically of “state power,” emphasising the increasing centralisation and repressive nature of this power. Initially the absolutist state, with its centralisation in terms of a standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judiciary, was a “mighty weapon” in the hands of the bourgeoisie against feudalism (Marx 1871e, 137).[7] In the bourgeois state that followed (after the French revolution), state power fully reveals its repressive face.[8] Thus, a parliamentary system means “direct control by the propertied classes,” which enabled “class terrorism” and a “national war-engine of capital against labour” (Marx 1871e, 138). Even though the bourgeoisie was subsequently driven out of direct control of power during the phases of the French empire (and indeed Prussian empire), it became even more adept at advancing its agenda even when not in direct control. As noted earlier, Louis Napoleon simply could not avoid a spate of policies that strengthened the economic and indeed systemic power of bourgeoisie. Thus, imperialism is both “the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the State power,” which “full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital” (Marx 1871e, 139).

To sum up: these historical narratives touch on each of the points identified earlier, but they move in a clear direction: the bourgeoisie’s final ability to set the agenda for the state, thereby determining the state’s nature. This agenda is implicitly economic, securing the many dimensions of the state to ensure the dominance of capital, although Marx tends not to spell out the details. Crucially, this dominance does not need to entail direct hold on political power, since the bourgeoisie had learnt through its long emergence that it could achieve the desired effect indirectly. Policies such as uniform weights and measures, exchangeable currencies, effective border control, efficient policing, communication, and infrastructure would ensure the secure transport of goods across countries. By the time we come to the “farce” of the reign of Louis Bonaparte, he simply could not avoid instituting more and more measures to ensure the bourgeoisie’s economic and political dominance. Given that the very nature and purpose of the bourgeois state is to exploit the proletariat, it should be no surprise that Marx would later conclude that the proletariat “cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes” (Marx 1871e, 137).[9]

## 2.3 Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Since it is clearly impossible to take over the state form of capitalism in the context of a socialist system, a question arises: what is to take its place? Marx's theoretical answer entails two proposals that sit rather uncomfortably with one another: the dictatorship of the proletariat and the commune. In what follows, I deal first with the proletarian dictatorship and then with the commune, after which I examine Marx's unresolved struggles in relating the two.

The first mention of the dictatorship of the working class or proletariat was in a series of articles published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* from January to October in 1850, although we have come to know the collated articles as "The Class Struggle in France, from 1848 to 1850" ("Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850"). This was the title proposed by Engels, after he had gathered the articles, wrote an introduction and added a fourth chapter of his own, and saw to the publication of the whole as a book (Marx 1895). I will have more to say concerning the circumstances of this process of editing and publication below, since here I focus on the key propositions concerning the proletarian dictatorship, with the majority of citations coming from this work by Marx.[10] A few references will also be made to some works from 1871 to 1875, in the context of the struggles with Bakunin and the Anarchists.

### 2.3.1 Main Features of the Proletarian Dictatorship

To begin with, the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat arises in response to "bourgeois dictatorship" or "bourgeois terrorism," which perpetuates the "rule of capital" and the "slavery of labour." Hence the slogan: "Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class [*Diktatur der Arbeiterklasse*]!" (Marx 1850a, 139; 1850b, 69). In other words, the proletarian dictatorship is the "revolt against the bourgeois dictatorship" and thereby a "change of society" (Marx 1850a, 190; 1850b, 125).[11]

Further, the concern of the proletarian dictatorship is both economic and political: the "appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class" (Marx 1850a, 147; 1850b, 78). The purpose is to overcome exploitation and ensure the economic well-being of the majority, of urban and rural workers, since the proletarian dictatorship is the

means to achieve “the abolition of all the relations of production” on which class distinctions rest, the “abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations” (Marx 1850a, 192; 1850b, 127).

Of necessity, the dictatorship of the proletariat is repressive of the small minority that comprised the former ruling class. As a joint statement of the “Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists” put it at the same time, this entails the “submission” of the “privileged classes” (and indeed the counter-revolution), since the “dictatorship of the proletarians” is to keep the “revolution in continual progress until the achievement of communism” (Vidil et al. 1850a, 568; 1850b, 614).[12] More sharply, in the “Manifesto” we find that the proletariat “as a ruling class sublates by violent force the old conditions of production [*als herrschende Klasse gewaltsam die alten Produktionsverhältnisse aufhebt*]” (Marx and Engels 1848a, 482). *Gewaltsam* is the crucial word, bearing the senses of violence, force and power.[13] Indeed, in his later notes on Bakunin, Marx uses the word three times: the proletariat “must use violent [*gewaltsame*] means,” the economic conditions that give rise to class struggle “must be cleared from the road or transformed by violent force [*müssen gewaltsam aus dem Weg geräumt oder umgewandelt werden*],”[14] and the process of transformation must “be accelerated by violent force [*gewaltsam beschleunigt werden*]” (Marx 1875b, 630).[15]

The proletarian dictatorship also has a strong centralising force. In a joint letter to the press from 1850, the section penned by Marx directly connects his comments on the dictatorship of the proletariat with the measures outlined in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (Marx and Engels 1850a, 354; 1850d, 387–388). So let us see what the Manifesto proposes, with a particular focus on the ten points that may be regarded as a preliminary program for what is to happen immediately after a successful proletarian revolution.[16] Not only does the Manifesto include repressive measures against the former ruling class and counter-revolutionary efforts, but it also clearly stresses the need for centralised measures. All of the ten points require strong governance, but note in particular the centralisation and indeed monopoly of communication, transport, and of credit in a national bank, the abolition of private property in land and inheritance, the control and expansion of agriculture and industry as the instruments of

production owned by the state, the "establishment of labour armies" and the "equal liability" of all adults to labour (Marx and Engels 1848a, 481–482; 1848b, 505–506). In short, it entails the state's centralised ownership of the means of production and thus control over the forces of production.[17]

Finally, the proletarian dictatorship is transitional: as "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850" puts it, revolutionary socialism is "the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the proletariat [Klassendiktatur *des Proletariats*] as the necessary transit point to the *abolition [*Abschaffung*] of class distinctions generally*" (Marx 1850a, 192; 1850b, 127).[18] Or as "Critique of the Gotha Programme" observes, between capitalist and communist society is also a "political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat* [die revolutionäre Diktatur des Proletariats]" (Marx 1875c, 22; 1875a, 95).[19] This is the same as what Marx calls the first or initial stage of communism, although no time frame is indicated (Marx 1875c, 11–15; 1875a, 83–87).

To sum up, the dictatorship of the proletariat is absolutely necessary for dealing with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which inescapably entails repression of the former ruling class and counter-revolutionary forces. It also exercises a process of centralisation, with a distinct focus on economic and political measures, and it is clearly transitional.

### 2.3.2 Analysis

A number of items need some further analysis, but first I need to address the important time-lag in the impact of what we now know as "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850." As mentioned earlier, the initial articles were published in 1850, and there was also a joint statement by the "Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists" at the same time that mentioned the dictatorship of the proletariat. After these appearances, there was a gap of about two decades before the term reemerged during the intense struggles with Bakunin and the Anarchists over the composition and direction of the First International. The real impact of Marx's initial deployment of the proletarian dictatorship was in the first half of the 1890s. Marx was already dead, so it fell to Engels to tackle the moderating wing of the massive German Social-Democratic Party and especially its representatives in the Reichstag. Under relentless pressure from more centrist and right-wing political parties, and driven by a desire to present a

more acceptable face of the Social Democrats in the wake of the Anti-Socialist Laws, this wing began to downplay revolution and the proletarian dictatorship. As we will see in the next chapter, Engels would have nothing of the sort. While fully acknowledging the need to be attuned to what would be effective in a particular time and place, Engels marshalled his energies to insist on the centrality of a proletarian revolution and the ensuing dictatorship of the proletariat. So he dusted off Marx's notes on the Gotha Program and ensured their publication, wrote a number of pieces himself, and—as mentioned—undertook the republication of the 1850 essays by Marx, now in book form and with the title *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (Marx 1895). By now, the terms initially used more than four decades earlier took on a whole new importance: the communist movement needed to persist with the "dictatorship [*Diktatur*] of the working class" and the "class dictatorship [*Klassendictatur*] of the proletariat" (Marx 1850a, 139, 192; 1850b, 69, 127).

This increased emphasis on the proletarian dictatorship as a core feature of socialist governance also raises a couple of questions. The first concerns centralisation, repression of the former ruling class, and violent force. Commentators have at times been troubled by this clear emphasis by Marx, suggesting that by "dictatorship" Marx meant "rule [*Herrschaft*]" or "worker's democracy," or following the moderating tendency against which Engels had already struggled by skipping past the proletarian dictatorship and emphasising the Paris Commune (Miliband 1965; Jessop 1978; Draper 1986, 175–306; Paolucci 2007, 233–237).[20] That such a dictatorship is necessary is clear from Marx's texts, especially for the sake of overcoming the counter-revolution, embodied in the "bourgeois dictatorship."[21] But should it also involve violent force? Earlier, I translated *gewaltsam* as "with violent force," simply because it is the core of the semantic field of the German term. Further, Marx's use of the word on three consecutive occasions in his critique of Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy* has a rhetorical effect that intensifies the senses of "force" or "violence" and "power." The risk of opting for the slightly softer "force"—common in translations—is that it feeds into the moderating tendency that has been a problem since at least the 1890s.

A further question concerns the relationship, found in "Critique of the Gotha Programme," between the "transitional phase" of the proletarian dictatorship and the first and higher phases of communist society. Marx's

comments are brief, deliberately so for reasons that will become clear later. But the question remains: what is the relationship between these two proposals? One possible interpretation is that Marx was suggesting an initial phase, which he called the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and that this would be followed by at least two subsequent stages within communism itself (Hua 1990). The problem is that such an interpretation requires importing a significant amount of extra material, leaving us with three phases rather than the two Marx mentions. Another and more natural interpretation is possible, which is that the proletarian dictatorship and the first stage of communism are the same. Thus, the first phase is not communist society developed on its own foundations, but “on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.” Marx writes of certain “defects,” such as unequal “bourgeois right,” differences between individuals that entail division of labour, recompense in terms of labour, and the existence of commodities, defects that are “inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth-pangs from capitalist society” (Marx 1875c, 13–15; 1875a, 85–87). Only in the higher phase can one speak of gradual disappearance of the “enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour,” entailing that class distinctions still exist in the first phase.[22] For these reasons, I have followed a more natural interpretation of the texts, in which the first phase, which has just emerged from capitalist society and is still stamped with it in so many ways, is to be equated with the “revolutionary transformation” from capitalist society to communist society, which is also a “political transition period” that Marx calls the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.” But it must be acknowledged that Marx’s comments are sparse and purely theoretical, and that his observations on the phases of communism and the proletarian dictatorship are separated by a number of pages, thereby leaving open the possibility of a range of interpretations.

## 2.4 The Commune

Given the centralised, repressive, and violently forceful nature of the proletarian dictatorship—economically and politically—in Marx’s texts, his

enthusiasm concerning the Paris Commune produces a notable tension in his thoughts on the nature of governance after a communist revolution. Before analysing this tension, let me identify the main points concerning the commune.

### 2.4.1 Marx's Presentation of the Paris Commune

Marx's much-studied observations on the Paris Commune appear in a few pages of "The Civil War in France," which was originally published in English (Marx 1871e, 137–147). To begin with, the very new political form of the commune requires the overcoming the old form of "state power," which entails moving the functions of governance from the state to the communes. Marx speaks of the "legitimate functions," and indeed the "whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State" being put in the hands of, "discharged by" and "restored" to the "responsible agents of society" (Marx 1871e, 140–141).[23]

Further, this appropriation has a number of dimensions, such as: (a) moving from a non-representative (bourgeois) parliamentary system to a "working … body, executive and legislative at the same time," for which elections are local, direct, and revocable; (b) suppressing the standing army and substitution by a National Guard comprised of working people; (c) stripping the police of "political attributes" and making them into responsible and revocable agents of the commune; (d) divesting the judiciary of "sham independence" and ensuring it is elected (Marx 1871e, 139–140).

These changes in the commune entailed decentralisation, with the old centralised government giving way to the "self-government of the producers"—a model replicated in even the smallest hamlet. They also entailed breaking the mechanisms of repression, whether police, army, judiciary or the "spiritual force of repression" embodied in the church and education (Marx 1871e, 140). Finally, the focus in Marx's observations on the commune are almost exclusively concerned with changes in the structures of governance, with little concerning economic measures. All we find are general observations concerning a "working-class government" for the sake of the "emancipation of Labour," a "lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule." Since everyone becomes a worker (and the workers express the only true hopes of the peasants), labour "ceases to be a class

attribute." Indeed, Marx emphasises that the commune was above all a "thoroughly expansive political form" (Marx 1871e, 142).[24]

In sum, Marx's observations on the Paris Commune focus almost entirely on its political transformations, with an emphasis on decentralisation and overcoming repression, and the free association of workers. Not unexpectedly, the commune has—through Marx's observations—become the ideal model, especially among Western Marxists, for what should happen after a proletarian revolution and the exercise of power. However, the representation of the commune raises more questions than it solves.

### 2.4.2 Limits of the Commune

The Paris Commune was the only concrete experience—brief and limited as it was—from which either Marx or Engels could draw any insights or lessons at all. Some had participated and escaped the slaughter thereafter, but Marx and Engels had to engage remotely, assessing what could be learned from afar. Further, the commune was the first concrete opportunity to test the policies of various revolutionary organisations, especially Proudhonists, Blanquists, and Communists. But it would come to be seen, especially by Engels (see the next chapter), as a very preliminary exercise of proletarian power and one that went by no means far enough in its measures.

Further, Marx's observations on the Paris Commune echo an earlier line of thought, with a relatively positive and Enlightenment-inspired perception of human nature. Thus, in texts from the mid-1840s, Marx writes of the alienation produced by the division of labour, of the patterns of domination and exploitation embodied in class structures and the concomitant patterns of the bourgeois state that had to be overcome by removing the causes of this alienation and reuniting the broken parts of human existence. At one point, Marx calls this reunited individual existence "human emancipation [*menschliche Emanzipation*]" (Marx 1844e, 163; 1844d, 168; see also 1844f, 182–183; 1844a, 187).[25] Perhaps the best image of this "human emancipation" appears in the first rough outline of historical materialism: "communist society … regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman,

herdsman or critic" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 33; 1846b, 47). As Harding (1984, 4) points out, this image—with touches of "agrarian anti-industrial socialism"—does not present one working as a "collier, fitter, assembly-worker and salesman." Of course, the notable shift with the Paris Commune is that it was precisely the workers of Paris that were the focus, but the risk is that Marx's depiction may drift away into well-nigh utopian images of a free association of workers. This is especially the case if one downplays the equally important role of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

### 2.4.3 Proletarian Dictatorship and the Commune

When we consider the proletarian dictatorship and the commune in relation to one another, we encounter a notable tension: one draws together economic and political factors and is focused on appropriating the means of production and controlling the forces of production, while the other treads lightly on economic matters; one is clearly centralised and repressive of the former ruling class while the other seeks to overcome the centralisation and repression of "state power." In short, one stipulates strong measures to overcome "bourgeois dictatorship" and the expected counter-revolution, while the other explores the internal workings of the association of equal workers (which was soon defeated by the counter-revolution).[26] Apart from the fact that it would fall to Engels to make an initial effort to solve this tension, the question remains: was Marx aware of the tension, if not outright contradiction? While Marx never explicitly equated the proletarian dictatorship with the commune (which was to be Engels' solution[27]), a few hints suggest that he was aware of the problem[28] and that he made some initial steps to understand their relationship.

To begin with, let us return to the point that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a transitional form, from capitalism to communism. There are two risks as how we may understand this transitional phase. The first risk is to assume that the proletarian dictatorship is to be a relatively brief period, deploying the old machinery of the state to crush the bourgeois dictatorship and deal with the inevitable counter-revolution.[29] In short, it is seen as part of the initial revolutionary seizure of power and should subsequently fall away. The second risk is that the proletarian dictatorship becomes the actual form of state power under socialism, and that it should entail the elimination of classes. Chinese Marxist scholarship has been particularly attentive to this question, since their analysis takes place within the context

of a socialist system under construction (Dai 2006; Yu 2002).[30] Here we find an emphasis on the transitional nature of the proletarian dictatorship, an awareness from actual experience that the transition period may take longer than some may have expected, but especially that it is not the actual state form of socialism and certainly does not entail the complete elimination of classes. In sum, the dictatorship of the proletariat functions as a political guarantee of the transition from capitalist society to a communist society.

Does this mean that we need to wait for the proletarian dictatorship to do its work so as to enable the commune to emerge? Or rather, what is the nature of the commune in this respect? Is it to be equated with communism as such? Three texts from the first half of the 1870s indicate that Marx was beginning to see that such a neat distinction is untenable, since the commune itself would need to exercise the proletarian dictatorship for the sake of its very survival. The first text is a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann from 1871, in which Marx is full of praise for the initiative and bravery of the Communards. However, he observes that it is not sufficient to "transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to *break* [*zerbrechen*] it, and that is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent" (Marx 1871a, 205; 1871b, 131).[31] Marx continues: although the commune was attempting to do this, it made two mistakes: it did not march on Versailles immediately (thus dealing with the counter-revolution) and the "Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune" (Marx 1871a, 205; 1871b, 132). While the proletarian dictatorship is not mentioned explicitly in the letter to Kugelmann, it does appear in the second text, a speech of a few months later where Marx makes the same point. We need to be a little wary here, since all we have of the speech is a report that paraphrases Marx's words at a celebration of the International's seventh anniversary in 1871. According to the report, Marx said that while the commune sought to remove the conditions for oppression by transferring the means of production to the labourer (note the economic focus here) and thereby bring to an end class society, "before such a change could be effected a proletarian dictature would become necessary, and the first condition of that was a proletarian army." Indeed, the "working classes would have to conquer the right to emancipate themselves on the battlefield" (Marx 1871d, 433; 1871c, 634). The suggestion in both the letter to Kugelmann and in the speech at the seventh

anniversary of the International (both in 1871) is that the commune should itself enact the proletarian dictatorship to the full so as to crush the forces of reaction and counter-revolution. In other words, by the early 1870s Marx was beginning to see the necessary connection between the proletarian dictatorship and the commune. We may see this relationship in terms of an effort to specify a dialectically inter-connected historical narrative, in which both must be present so as to enable the full realisation of the commune itself.[32]

This is indeed the concern of the third text, the commentary on Bakunin's *Statehood and Anarchy*, where Marx indicates that the centralisation already outlined in the "Manifesto" would require coercion, force and violence during the initial phase when the old economic forms persist, along with the associated class dynamics and political forms. Here we find that the repressive coercion of the proletarian dictatorship is precisely the means for "sublating" the old economic basis and thereby the proletariat's own character "as a class [*als Klasse aufheben*]." Only when this situation has finally been achieved can the methods used for achieving it be discarded (Marx 1875b, 634–636; 1875d, 519–521). It is in this light that we should understand the observations in "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (see above), where the dictatorship of the proletariat is coterminous with the initial stage of communism and that the further stage would begin to see the unfolding of full communism (Marx 1875c, 11–15; 1875a, 83–87).[33]

Before turning to the question as to what happens to the state, we should note that Marx sees both the proletarian dictatorship and the commune as very much works in progress. While one is a transitional means, he observes in relation to the commune that one should not "expect miracles" or "ready-made utopias," but rather be prepared for long struggles, historical processes, and the need to transform both circumstances and human beings. A crucial aspect of these struggles is dealing with counter-revolution. The proletarian dictatorship was geared to deal with such matters, but even with the commune Marx notes that it existed as a "besieged town," only to suffer too soon the deception and savagery of the old order based at Versailles.

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## 2.5 On Socialist Governance

What happens to the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the commune? Marx was drawn to deal with this question in the 1870s, in the wake of the Paris Commune's demise and the struggle with Bakunin and the Anarchists in the International. Marx offers a few suggestions, but it is clear that his energy was waning by that time, or at least that his energies were directed to other matters. While Engels would offer a much fuller answer (see the next chapter), my concern here is with Marx's suggestions.

The dictatorship of the proletarian was a relatively straightforward question, since it clearly exercises the activities or functions of what would normally be connected with a strong state. I think less here of the way it should use the mechanisms of existing state structures to prosecute its self-abolishing agenda, but more in terms of the implications that arise in light of Marx's historical arguments that the nature of the state is determined by the class in control: if the workers and peasants are in control during a transitional period of proletarian dictatorship, does not the state begin to change its nature? Indeed, can we still speak of a state as it had thus far been defined?

The commune posed more of a problem for Marx, for here he equivocates. Or at least he does so between the earlier drafts and the final form of "The Civil War in France." In the first draft, Marx writes that the commune was not a revolution "against this or that, legitimate, constitutional, republican or Imperialist form of State Power." Instead, it was a revolution against "the *State* itself, this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people, of its own social life" (Marx 1871f, 55). The "state" per se is "separate and independent from society" (Marx 1871f, 56), being the machinery of class domination by its very definition. In this light, it matters not which form of the state appears, for each is essentially the same, and against the state as such the commune becomes a Hegelian negation. Notably, in the second and especially the final version of "The Civil War in France" Marx drops the sentence concerning the "revolution against the state itself"[34] and his writing becomes more considered, specifying "state power" and delineating clearly the commune's exercise of certain governing functions that are directly responsible to the people. In fact, Marx had also mentioned in the first draft that "state functions" are "reduced to a few functions for general national purposes" (Marx 1871f, 58), and it was precisely this feature that would come to the fore in the final version of the text.[35] In other words, Marx

seems to have realised that the flourish of the first draft was by no means realistic and indeed drifted in an anarchist direction. Instead, the commune itself had in fact exercised a number of governing functions.

In two other works from the 1870s, Marx offers a few intriguing suggestions concerning the nature of these governing functions. In "Critique of the Gotha Programme," he tackles the question of the "free state" proposed by the German workers' party. Three features of Marx's response are relevant. To begin with, he reiterates the position—well-established in his work by now—that "existing society" is the "basis [*Grundlage*]" of the existing state and that the state in question is not an independent entity. Here he adds a crucial parenthetical comment: "or of the future state in the case of future society."[36] In other words, any form of the state in future society would also be shaped by that society. Next, he points out that while present states manifest significant variety they have in common the fact that they are "based on modern bourgeois society [*der modernen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft stehn*]." But what is the reason for the variety? They are "more or less capitalistically developed," by which he means that they are "more or less free from medieval admixture" and influenced by particular historical developments. Thus, even capitalist society, depending on the complexities of local histories, is in various stages of transition between feudalism and capitalism (in a European context). And this is so after hundreds of years of capitalist development. Will this also be the case in any future society, until at last the "present root, bourgeois society, will have died off [*abgestorben ist*]"? The final point returns to the nature of governance in the future, after a proletarian revolution and during the long task of socialist construction. Marx asks: "what transformation will the state undergo in communist society [*kommunistischen Gesellschaft*]?" He then reframes the question: "In other words, what social functions [*welche gesellschaftliche Funktionen*] will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions [*jetzigen Staatsfunktionen analog*]?" These reflections are obviously in a similar vein to those of "The Civil War in France" of a few years before. Even in a communist society, distinct social functions will be required that are analogous to present state functions. Or rather, Marx raises the question without offering an answer. The reason is that he does not have the actual data, the experience of constructing a communist society after a revolution. As he observes, the question can be answered "only scientifically [*nur*

*wissenschaftlich*].” Now some ambivalence creeps into Marx’s text. Having raised the questions (above) and having refused an answer, he then mentions the transition period and the dictatorship of the proletariat. We are left wondering: when he mentions “communist society” earlier, with its social functions analogous to present-day state functions, hinting at a qualitatively distinct form of governance that arises from communist society, does he mean this first and transitional stage, however long it may be?[37] Or does he mean the full realisation of communism, when bourgeois society has completed disappeared?

The other text—Marx’s commentary on Bakunin—is one we have already encountered on a number of occasions in this chapter. Earlier, I noted the strong language in terms of the proletarian dictatorship and the beginnings of a dialectical approach in which the aforesaid dictatorship is required for the commune itself. Here I am interested in Marx’s struggle to find an adequate terminology concerning the nature of governance that is to follow. In a series of responses to Bakunin’s questions, Marx makes the following pertinent points. In order to achieve “self-government of the communities,” one still needs an executive.[38] Take the example of a trades union, where an executive administers the “common interests.” Obviously, such a situation entails “division of labour.” This is not to say that a worker ceases to be a worker when elected to an executive, in the same way that a factory owner today does not cease “to be a capitalist when he becomes a municipal councillor.” But what is the function of elections? They are not progressive in and of themselves, for they depend on the “economic foundations,” if not the “economic interrelations of the voters.” Thus, as soon as the “functions” are no longer political, “(1) government functions no longer exist; (2) the distribution of general functions has become a routine matter which entails no domination; (3) elections lose their present political character.” Clearly, Marx is struggling at this point. On the one hand, he asserts the absence of “government functions” and “political character”—the latter meaning the manifestation of class struggle in the antagonistic politics of the state.[39] At the same time, he has to admit that there is a “distribution of general functions,” if not division of labour, executives, and the need to administer the new forms. So he finds himself using two significant phrases. The first: there will be “no state in the present political sense [*keinen Staat im jetzigen politischen Sinne geben*].” Here Marx leaves open the possibility of a state in a rather different political

sense. The second: “what forms could management functions [*Verwaltungsfunktionen*] assume within such a workers’ state [*Arbeiterstaats*], if he wants to call it that?” We should read too much into the term “workers’ state,” since it is an appropriated term and thus a placeholder. Of more interest is the other terminology Marx uses: general functions, management function, government functions. None of these entail a “state” as it had been experienced and understood, as a power separated from and opposed to society. But some form of qualitatively distinct form of governance there must be, arising from communist society.

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## 2.6 Conclusion

To sum up, I have focused on Marx’s suggestions as to what might happen to the state after a communist revolution. On this matter, Marx bequeathed a distinct tension to the subsequent tradition concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the commune. Clearly, both are found in Marx’s texts, and he also seems to have been aware of the problem. All he offers are hints and initial thoughts as to how they may be related, suggesting the rudiments of a dialectical inter-connection between the two. This suggestion moves towards—but does not decisively conclude—a situation in which both the proletarian dictatorship and the commune are part of the initial phase of communism. Further, in the 1870s Marx began to struggle with the forms of administration or governance after a revolution and during the period of constructing socialism. While he usually suggests that the proletarian dictatorship deploys the mechanisms of the existing state to achieve its aims, implications arise in light of his argument that the dominant class determines the nature of the state. More significant are his efforts to outline the governing functions required after a proletarian revolution, of which he thought he caught a glimpse in the Paris Commune. Working between his in-built assumptions and previously stated positions, he begins to speak apophatically of “no state in the present political sense,” and positively in terms of management and governing functions.

To add to these intriguing possibilities, the German word used when Marx discusses the transitional function of the dictatorship of the proletariat is none other than *Aufhebung/aufheben* (noun and verb), which is best translated with the Latin-derived “sublation.” In the “Manifesto,” he and Engels write that the old conditions of production, when the proletariat is

the ruling class, are “sublated [*aufhebt*]” with violent force (Marx and Engels 1848a, 482). Even more, the outcome of the whole process is that the proletariat does the same—*hebt* … *auf*—to classes and thereby its own domination. Further, in his letter to Weydemeyer of 1852 Marx writes that the proletarian dictatorship is a transition to the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of all classes (Marx 1852b, 508). And in the later reflections on Bakunin, Marx deploys a dialectical narrative in which the workers’ dictatorship is precisely the means for the proletariat to “sublate itself as a class [*als Klasse aufheben*]” (Marx 1875b, 634). This is, of course, a favoured Hegelian term, now deployed in a materialist register. I have suggested that the best translation is “sublation,” both abolishing what has gone before and transforming it into a qualitatively distinct entity. The tantalising suggestion arises whether the conditions of production and classes will not simply be abolished and destroyed, but that they will be transformed and continue in hitherto unexpected forms. Does this also apply to the state, which would then appear in a way not seen before, in a qualitatively distinct form of governance?

Yet, Marx was also profoundly reticent to offer much in the way of concrete prognostication. This was not so much due to a wariness of blueprints, but rather to the knowledge that he had not experienced a successful revolution—one that had seen off the counter-revolution and had found some peace and space to begin constructing socialism. After all, one needs concrete evidence to be able to elaborate and develop theories that arise from the evidence. As he observes in “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” such a question can be answered “only scientifically [*nur wissenschaftlich*].” To others would fall the experience and the consequent evidence, as well as the philosophical reflection necessary to understand what was happening, if not offer possible guides for action. That there would be unexpected turns and developments hardly needs saying.

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# Footnotes

1 It is important to retain the terminology of the German *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, since it reminds us that Marx is speaking of "bourgeois society." Unfortunately, the term is usually translated and thereby neutralised as "civil society," even to the point of a later German back-translation as *Zivilgesellschaft* (Kocha 2004, 67). Crucially, for Hegel and Marx, this *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* includes economic activity, although in later developments of the concept "the economy" was excluded. Although Marx (1843b, 105; 1843a, 95) already suggests that Hegel's formulae should be located in the hybrid situation of the Prussian empire, where a bourgeois state had not yet emerged, in *The German Ideology* he and Engels specify: "The term '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*' emerged in the eighteenth century when property relations had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval community. *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as such only develops with the bourgeoisie [*Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft als solche entwickelt sich erst mit der Bourgeoisie*]" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 36; 1846b, 89). For a detailed analysis of the terminology in the works of Marx and Engels, see my earlier study (Boer 2018).

2 In the Critique of Hegel, Marx returns to this point repeatedly (1843b, 9, 23–24, 39–40, 79, 87, 90–91, 116; 1843a, 9, 24–25, 43–44, 88, 96, 99–100, 125–126) and it also appears in *The Holy Family* (1845a, 120; 1845b, 113). For a detailed assessment of Marx's intense engagement with Hegel, see Leopold (2007, 17–99).

3 That the state arises from class struggle became an assumed position, appearing frequently in later works (Marx 1859b, 100–101; 1859a, 262–264; 1894b, 766–767; 1894a, 777–778).

4 *The German Ideology* on at least one occasion tends in this direction: “the state is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests” (Marx and Engels 1846a, 62; 1846b, 90). This approach is sometimes labelled “instrumentalist,” but this is a misleading simplification.

5 As *The German Ideology* observes, the “social power” of a ruling class has “its *practical*-idealistic expression in each case in the form of the state,” meaning that “their power must be constituted as the *state* [*als Staat konstituieren*]” (Marx and Engels 1846a, 69, 311; 1846b, 52, 329). Emphasis in the original. This point arises out of a detailed polemic against Max Stirner’s approach to the state (and private property and law), in the crucial long chapter on Stirner in which Marx and Engels first developed the rudiments of historical materialism. For useful outlines of and engagements with Stirner’s philosophy, see Beiser (2011) and Leopold (2006).

6 For an insightful analysis of the complexities of this text, see Jessop (2007, 83–100). For a comparable account of the trials and tribulations of the bourgeoisie in relation to the state under Napoleon Bonaparte, leading to its “political enlightenment,” see *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels 1845a, 130–131; 1845b, 122–124).

7 Since this text was originally published in English, I cite only the English version.

8 Duly stressed by Poulantzas (1969, 76), although he skips the repressive role of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

9 Or as Marx and Engels put it in a review of the bourgeois socialism of Girardin (1850c, 196–197; 1850b, 333): “The bourgeois state is nothing more than the mutual insurance of the bourgeois class against its individual members, as well as against the exploited class, insurance which will necessarily become increasingly expensive and to all appearances increasingly independent of bourgeois society, because the oppression of the exploited class is becoming ever more difficult”.

10 Since the text now appears in critical editions in light of cross-checking between the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the book of 1895, I cite the text from these critical editions.

11 Class conflict must attain a high level before a “revolutionary dictatorship” can be seized (Marx 1850a, 166; 1850b, 98).

12 Note also the representation put in the mouths of Proudhonists: “If the political struggle of the working class assumes violent forms and if the workers replace the dictatorship of the bourgeois class with their own revolutionary dictatorship …” (Marx and Engels 1873, 106; Marx 1873, 393).

13 See the detailed treatment of this term in *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Boer 2021, 16–19, 25–50).

14 The metaphorical phrase, *aus dem Weg räumen*, has a number of senses in German, turning on clearing something off the road, removing obstacles (*Hindernisse*) from the road, clearing a barrier (*ein Sperre*), and so eliminating, ironing out, doing away with and sweeping away. Political resonances run through the phrase.

15 Translations mine. A few pages later, Marx mentions the “general means of coercion in its struggle [*allgemeine Zwangsmittel im Kampf*]” (Marx 1875b, 634; 1875d, 519).

16 For reference, the ten points are as follows:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into

cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.

8. Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.

9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.

10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c, &cc.

17 And as “Critique of the Gotha Programme” indicates in dealing with the transitional “first phase” of communism, inequality would have to be the norm, precisely for the sake of overcoming economic inequality: “right would have to be unequal rather than equal” (Marx 1875c, 14–15; 1875a, 86–87).

18 Or as Marx puts it in letter to Weydemeyer: “My own contribution was 1. to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with certain *historical phases in the development of production*; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to *the Aufhebung of all classes* and to a *classless society*” (Marx 1852b, 508; 1852c, 62–65). Emphasis in original.

19 Emphasis in original.

20 For a good number of “Western” Marxists, the moderating desire is part and parcel of truncating Marxism by cutting off Engels and the whole tradition that followed, from Lenin to Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping..

21 The dictatorship of the proletariat was clearly not “Blanquist,” for which the dictatorship in question is not by the proletariat but by a small band of dedicated revolutionaries over the proletariat (Draper 1986, 34–39, 120–171, 264–268).

22 Marx makes matters more complicated by observing that in the first phase unequal “bourgeois right” recognises “no class distinctions [*keine Klassenunterschiede*]” (Marx 1875c, 14; 1875a, 86). Does he mean that classes as such do not exist, or that “bourgeois right” does not recognise classes in its operation? The latter seems the more likely sense, especially in light of Marx’s comments on the

continued reality of inequality and that division of labour disappears only with the higher phase of communist society.

23 In the notes on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, Marx speaks of the way elections are determined by the economic foundations. With the removal of patterns of economic exploitation, he writes that the "distribution of general functions has become a routine matter which entails no domination [*keine Herrschaft*]" (Marx 1875b, 635; 1875d, 519).

24 The first draft also offers only brief and general observations on economic matters (Marx 1871f, 59).

25 Note also: "Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the state; in order therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the state" (Marx and Engels 1846a, 77; 1846b, 80). See further Leopold's detailed investigation (2007, 183–277).

26 The commentators who actually recognise this tension are few (Harding 1984, 3–14; Leys and Panitch 2000, 115–116).

27 In his introduction to the third edition of Marx's "The Civil War in France," Engels writes: "do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat [*Das war die Diktatur des Proletariats*]" (Engels 1891a, 16; 1891b, 191; see also Johnstone 1971; Balibar 1977, 58; Van Ree 2015, 77, 115).

28 Harding (1984, 13–14) speculatively suggests that Marx was perhaps embarrassed by the tension and studiously avoided identifying the commune with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Note further that in "Critique of the Gotha Programme" Marx was quite scathing of the "old democratic litany familiar to all: universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people's militia, etc." This, Marx suggests, is a "mere echo of the bourgeois People's Party, of the League of Peace and Freedom" (Marx 1875c, 22; 1875a, 95).

29 Some earlier material by Marx moves in this direction. While not yet mentioning the proletarian dictatorship, Marx speaks of restricting the "*destruction* and *dissolution* [*der* Zerstörung *und der* Auflösung]" to the revolutionary process itself, without a following period for the establishment of working class rule and the need to deal with the counter-revolution. Instead, after the revolution, "socialism throws off its *political* cloak [politische *Hülle*]" (Marx 1844c, 463; 1844b, 206). Emphasis in original.

30 The dates of these Chinese Marxist studies are significant. In the debate of the first decade of the 2000s, there was a concerted effort to come to terms with the slogan deployed during the leftist deviation of the "Cultural Revolution": "continuous revolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat." The debate was resolved when it became clear that the proletarian dictatorship should not be dropped and should not be universalised, but properly understood.

31 Emphasis in original.

32 In light of the fuller realisation of a socialist rule of law, some more recent Chinese research sees the stipulations concerning the commune as a form of restriction and supervision of the power of the proletarian dictatorship (Jia and Zhao 2021).

33 Although Balibar reads a little too much of Lenin's thought into that of Marx (and Engels), he does stress this particular point (Balibar 1977, 63).

34 Those who quote this text as a supposedly definitive statement of Marx's approach to the state after a proletarian revolution neglect to specify that it comes from the first draft of "The Civil War in France" and was later dropped in the second draft and final version (Miliband 1965, 290; Jessop 1978, 52; 1982, 27).

35 Note also that the first draft speaks of the "reabsorption of the State power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression" (Marx 1871f, 56).

36 Quotations in this paragraph are drawn from a couple of pages in "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (Marx 1875c, 21–22; 1875a, 94–95).

37 Draper (1970, 294) opts for this answer, based on a comment made much earlier in the text concerning communist society "not as it has developed on its own foundations, but on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society." However, in the passage here under analysis, Marx leaves the possibilities more open than Draper admits.

38 The quotations in the remainder of the paragraph are drawn from a few insightful pages of the notes on Bakunin (Marx 1875b, 634–635; 1875d, 519–520).

39 As the Communist Manifesto observes, “Political *Gewalt*, properly so called, is merely the organised *Gewalt* of one class for oppressing another” (Marx and Engels 1848a, 482; 1848b, 505). Or as “Misère de la Philosophie” puts it: “political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society [*pouvoir politique est précisément le résumé officiel de l'antagonisme dans la société civile*]” (Marx 1847a, 177; 1847b, 212).

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# 3. Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance

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## 3.1 Opening Remarks

In the previous chapter on Marx, I mentioned that it was Engels who provided the most substantial material on the nature of hitherto existing states and the potential nature of socialist governance. We may see this in terms of the division of labour between Marx and Engels, in which Engels not only provided the foundations for what became known as dialectical materialism (and coined the term "historical materialism" to speak of its specific application to socio-economic matters), but also engaged in extensive research on the history of the state in Europe. It is from this latter research that Engels sought to elaborate the basic principles of socialist governance. As he did so, Engels also made some headway in solving the problems that Marx did not resolve.

The following material is divided into four main parts. The first tackles the nature of states experienced thus far in human history, which Engels defines in terms of a "separated public power." Engels also emphasises the role of *Gewalt*, the power, force, and even violence, entailed in bourgeois dominance. (Since the semantic field of *Gewalt* cannot be captured by a single English word, I leave it in the original German.) This leads to the second part, which focuses on the role of proletarian *Gewalt* through the revolutionary process, but especially after the seizure of power and the

initial steps of socialist construction. The main manifestation of this proletarian *Gewalt* is, of course, the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Engels defended resolutely in the early 1890s against moderating tendencies. The third part deals with the much misunderstood concept of the "dying away of the state." The position hammered out in the struggle with the Anarchists under Bakunin in the 1870s is that the state would certainly not be abolished (*Abschaffung*) by a sheer act of will immediately after a proletarian revolution, but that its eventual disappearance, falling asleep of itself, or dying away would be one of the final results of the long construction of socialism. Theoretically, this approach arises from the point that the state is a superstructural feature built upon a socio-economic base. It follows that the primary focus after a proletarian revolution should be precisely on the necessary economic and social measures required for socialist construction. The fourth and final part deals with the principles of socialist governance, which for Engels entails that public power (*Gewalt*) stands in the midst of society and no longer has a political character, since class struggle will have become a feature of the past. Further, this public *Gewalt* is to be focused on the administration of the stuff of life and conduct of the economy for the good of the whole community (*Gemeinwesen*). It would be far more complex and detailed than anything we have seen before.

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## 3.2 The State as a Separated Public *Gewalt*

Engels's proposals concerning actually existing states in human history have been deeply influential in Marxist historiography, but my interest here is in presenting the key findings and in identifying how they clarify and extend Marx's initial suggestions. Engels's most significant contribution is to be found in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which is primarily concerned with the state (Engels 1892a, 262–266; 1892b, 268–272). Most of the material that follows is drawn from this text.[1]

To begin with, the key point is that the state is a "public [*öffentliche*] *Gewalt*" that is "separated [*getrennte*]" from society (Engels 1892a, 204, 211, 214, 222, 264; 1892b, 201, 210, 213, 221, 269–270).[2] This definition not only sharpens the point that Engels and Marx had already developed in terms of the state arising from socio-economic conditions,[3] but it also anchors all of Engels observations concerning the nature and history of the state. Second, the state as a separated *Gewalt* may either be imposed from

without or arise from within a society that is riven with the "irreconcilable opposites" of "classes with conflicting economic interests."[4] Third, so that society does not break down entirely through such conflict, a *Gewalt* is necessary to "alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'." Fourth, this *Gewalt* "alienates itself more and more" from society, so that it becomes "separated," "alienated' and "above" society. Fifth, the alienation of this *Gewalt* from society appears initially as a distinct armed force that is no longer of the people (as with a militia), but it also comes to include instruments of repression in terms of "material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds." Sixth, alongside these instruments are "organs of society [*Organe der Gesellschaft*]," which are not part of society, which do not stand in its midst, but are "above" and "alien [*entfremdenden*]" and need to be imposed on society through a system of laws and by means of taxes.

My interest here is not in elaborating these points for the sake of extensive treatment of historical states, or indeed of the capitalist state. Instead, I am interested in the implications for socialist governance. The key question is the nature of the "public *Gewalt*." As we have seen, Engels defines hitherto existing states as "separated [*getrennte*]" from society, but this raises the question as to whether a form of public *Gewalt* exists, or may exist, that is not so separated. In the material under consideration, Engels does speak of organs of governance that stand "in the midst of society [*eben mitten in der Gesellschaft*]" (Engels 1892a, 265; 1892b, 270). Here he writes of pre-state formations, but elsewhere we find the observation that after a proletarian revolution "public functions [*funzioni pubbliche*] will lose their political character [*carattere politico*]" (Engels 1873b, 86; 1873e, 425). Or, as the Communist Manifesto puts it, "public *Gewalt* will lose its political character [*verliert die öffentliche Gewalt den politischen Charakter*]" (Marx and Engels 1848a, 482; 1848b, 505). "Political character" refers to the antagonistic reality of class struggle, which led to the state in its earlier forms. I will have more to say on these matters later in the chapter, save to emphasise here that in a communist framework there would indeed be a public *Gewalt* that would not be politicised, that would not be separated from society.

### 3.2.1 Determination of the State

A further question concerns the relation between the state and the society from which it is alienated and separated. Depending on the context and specific issue at stake, Engels moves between three main positions:

(a) The state is a "means of keeping" down the oppressed, is an "instrument [*Werkzeug*]" for exploitation by the economically dominant class.

(b) A state may gain "relative autonomy [*relativen Selbständigkeit*]," either during a period of relative balance in class conflict with neither class able to assert dominance, or when the state asserts its own agenda on the economy, which may hinder or favour economic development (Engels 1890a, 490; 1890c, 59–60).

(c) The state may be an "organisation of the possessing class [*Organisation der besitzenden Klasse*]," so that we may speak of the "state of slave owners," the "feudal state [*Feudalstaat*]" and the "modern representative state [*Repräsentativstaat*]" or the "state of the capitalists." which is "the ideal personification of the total national capital [*der ideelle Gesamtkapitalist*]" (Engels 1878b, 443). Here, the implication is that the nature of a specific form of the state is determined by the class in control.[5]

While the instrumental and (semi-) autonomous approaches would come to characterise two main directions of subsequent Western Marxist scholarship on the capitalist state,[6] I am interested here what is Engels's most sustained position: the nature of the state is determined by the class in power.[7] This approach is best embodied in the observation that with the rise of parliamentary democracy and its apparent "universal suffrage," wealth "exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely [*seine Macht indirekt, aber um so sichrer aus*]" (Engels 1892a, 265; 1892b, 271).

### 3.2.2 The Role of *Gewalt*: Bismarck's Germany

The most significant case study of this indirect shaping of the capitalist state appears in "The Role of Force in History" (Engels 1888a; 1888b).[8] As a notable complement to Marx's focus on Louis Napoleon (III) in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," Engels's concern is Bismarck's rise to power and Germany's inevitable path to European dominance. Engels argues that no

matter how much Bismarck may have sidelined the bourgeoisie from direct state power, he brought to completion the political and economic structures of a capitalist state. Since the bourgeoisie had since the mid-nineteenth century expanded as never before the network of industry and international trade, it sought a unified German state—with uniform laws, regulations, and currency—to facilitate further development and enhance the easy mobility of labour. Bismarck obliged, enacting law after law that met bourgeois demands while ensuring that actual state power remained out of their hands. The bourgeoisie consented, since they could see that Bismarck was not only shaping the new German state in their image, but that he was also protecting them from having to face their real enemy, the working class.[9] As Engels puts it, the "bourgeoisie triumphed without having to put up a serious fight" (Engels 1888a, 80; 1888b, 472).

Perhaps the time is overdue to say a little more concerning *Gewalt*, which I have left untranslated since the term's semantic field includes power, force, and violence. But does Engels's usage actually include such a range of meaning? In order to make a thorough scientific assessment, I tracked every usage by Engels in the 1870s and 1880s of *Gewalt* itself, the important adverbial form *gewaltsam* (and *mit Gewalt*), the adjectival *Gewalttätig*, and the expected German link-words such as *Gewaltmaßnahmen* and *Gewalttätigkeiten*. The outcome: the term is overwhelmingly used in its harder sense. To give a couple of the more telling examples: in "The Role of Force" Engels writes that "the practice of Gewalt [*Gewaltspraxis*] entails blood and iron," which boils down to "brutal force [*brutale Gewalt*]" (Engels 1888a, 66, 101).[10]

Indeed, the way *Gewalt* plays out in "The Role of Force" is in terms of military machinations, beginning with the fact that German political and economic unity had to be "won in struggle [*erkämpft werden*]" against external and internal enemies (Engels 1888a, 70; 1888b, 460). The turning point was when reunification took the path of Prussian hegemony (rather than Austrian hegemony or the genuine overcoming of differences between all German states). Humiliation at the hand of Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century spurred Bismarck to undertake a comprehensive restructuring of the armed forces, resulting in decisive victory over Denmark within a decade. From this point, the path led eventually to the conquest of France, at which point the new German empire became the "first power [*erste Macht*]" in Europe, with all power concentrated in the

hands of the dictator Bismarck (Engels 1888a, 104; 1888b, 498).[11] In terms of internal processes, Engels focuses on the tensions and collaborations between the bourgeoisie and Bismarck. The former demanded a revolutionary transformation of Germany, but this could be achieved "only by *Gewalt*," which he immediately defines as "only by an actual dictatorship." Two types of *Gewalt* exist in the modern state, namely the "elemental *Gewalt* of the popular masses" and "organised state *Gewalt* [*Staatsgewalt*]" as found the army. On both counts the bourgeoisie faced problems: while it had become deeply suspicious of the force of the masses, it also did not have the army at its disposal. "But," Engels points out, "Bismarck had," so much so that he embodied *Staatsgewalt* (Engels 1888a, 87; 1888b, 479).

Thus far, I have covered relatively well-known territory concerning a Marxist approach to former states, and particularly the capitalist state. I have also pointed out that Engels in many cases sharpened and clarified Marx's ideas, setting the contours for subsequent (mostly Western) Marxist research on the capitalist state. With the treatment of Bismarck and the role of *Gewalt*, I have moved into material that, although relatively ignored in some circles, provides us with a central term for understanding the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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## 3.3 Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Socialist *Gewalt*

This section makes two points. First, Engels argued strongly that the proletarian dictatorship and the commune are coterminous in the initial phase of socialism in power. Second, we have Engels to thank for emphasising the importance of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which he saw as a concrete manifestation of socialist *Gewalt*. In making these moves, Engels both clarified some of Marx's cryptic formulations and took a distinct step beyond Marx.

### 3.3.1 Proletarian Dictatorship and the Commune

Engels used the terminology of proletarian dictatorship during two periods, between 1872 and 1874 in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, and between 1890 and 1891 in his struggle with the "rightist" deviation in the

German Social-Democratic Party, which sought to downplay revolutionary struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. During the first period, Engels clarified the meaning of the proletarian dictatorship by distinguishing it from individual dictatorship (Bakunin, for example) or that of a small group (the Blanquist emphasis). Instead, after a proletarian revolution, the dictatorship that follows should be collective, comprising "the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat" (Engels 1874b, 373). Further, in response to the Proudhonist current in the Paris Commune, Engels stresses that the proletarian dictatorship is not outside the mainstream of the working class movement. Every "real proletarian party," he writes in *The Housing Question*, has a class policy according to which an independent political party is the primary condition of struggle and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is "the immediate aim of the struggle" (Engels 1873i, 63; 1873f, 372).

The process of clarification also led to step beyond Marx: the argument that the Paris Commune was itself a manifestation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As noted in the previous chapter, Marx was unable unable to resolve the tension between the commune and the proletarian dictatorship, although he did begin to offer a few hints. Engels would take these hints to their logical conclusion, identifying some of the measures instituted by the Paris Commune as acts of the proletarian dictatorship.

Let me quote the main texts in which Engels makes this point, before setting the context for such an emphasis:

> It does the Commune the greatest honour … that in all its economic measures the "driving spirit" was … in accordance with the spirit of German scientific socialism. In the same way, when the so-called Blanquists made an attempt to transform themselves from mere political revolutionists into a socialist workers' faction with a definite programme … they … adopted, and almost literally at that, the views of German scientific socialism on the necessity of political action by the proletariat and of its dictatorship [*des Proletariats und seiner Diktatur*] as the transition [*Uebergang*] to the abolition [*Abschaffung*] of classes and, with them, of the state—views such as had already been expressed in the Communist Manifesto and since then on innumerable occasions (Engels 1873i, 62; 1873f, 370).

> Of late the German philistine[12] has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat [*Diktatur des Proletariats*] (Engels 1891d, 16; 1891e, 191).
>
> First. If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power [*Herrschaft*] under the form of a democratic republic [*Form der demokratischen Republik*]. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat [*die Diktatur des Proletariats*], as the great French revolution has already shown (Engels 1891f, 49–50; 1891a, 227).
>
> Otherwise why should we be fighting for the political dictatorship of the proletariat if political power [*die politische Macht*] is economically powerless [*ohnmächtig*]? *Gewalt* (i.e. state power [*Staatsmacht*]) is also an economic force [*ökonomische Potenz*]! (Engels 1890a, 493; 1890c, 63).[13]

By now the point should be clear and I refer the reader to detailed exegesis of these statements elsewhere (Boer 2021b, 28–41). However, I would like to emphasise the context for these observations, especially from the early 1890s. The relevant texts by Engels appeared during a period when the communist movement worldwide had made considerable progress. Political parties had established themselves and gained hundreds of thousands of members, especially in Germany. The situation produced extensive debate over theory, policies, and programs. But there was a new reality: many of the proletarian parties were increasingly able to operate within the structures of the capitalist state and its form of democracy, with representatives often elected to parliaments. Pressure grew to soften communism's more radical edges, since some felt that these threatened the new-found legitimacy of the parties in question. The desire for moderation was enhanced in Germany by Bismarck's infamous anti-socialist laws from 1878 to 1890. Even though support for the German Social-Democratic Party grew during this period, questions arose. Should the party continue to advocate "illegal" means, such as revolution and proletarian dictatorship? Or should it be content to work within the existing structures and pursue peaceful transition? As an old revolutionary hand, Engels could see the

need to be sensitive to the mood of the times, adjusting strategy where necessary and warning against untimely insurrection where it would simply reinforce suppression. But he also insisted on core revolutionary positions, especially when he saw them threatened (Zhang H. 1991). The dictatorship of the proletariat was one such position, which he felt called upon to defend and uphold especially in the early 1890s. Even more, he was adamant that a gentle and idealistic image of the commune—harking back to the utopian communism against which he and Marx had struggled in earlier decades—was a distortion. It was in this context that Engels dusted off Marx's notes and enabled the publication for the first time of "Critique of the Gotha Programme," gathered together Marx's essays under the title of "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850," wrote an introduction to the latter and also to the third edition of Marx's "The Civil War in France," wrote a pointed critique of the "Erfurt Program," and engaged in extensive correspondence. It is precisely from these works that I drew the most significant quotations above. All of these tasks sought to arrest the moderating wing of the German Party and insist on the centrality of appropriate revolutionary action and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The risk Engels faced has certainly not disappeared. From time to time, "rightist" moderates have found the proletarian dictatorship distinctly embarrassing and even alarming and have sought to water it down or dispense with it altogether. To give two examples. First, there is a tendency among some "Western" Marxists to focus in a one-sided manner on Marx's depiction of the Paris Commune and tread softly on the proletarian dictatorship, with the result that socialism becomes a quasi-utopian project or is seen to operate within the horizon of of capitalist "liberal" democracy (Johnstone 1971; Miliband 1991, 151; Nimtz 2000, 218–219; Van Ree 2015, 77, 115; Ware 2019, 161–163).[14] Second, one of the manifestations of the ideological disarray in China that followed in the wake of the "wild 90 s" was a struggle over the concept and practice of the proletarian dictatorship. This was a complex debate, with a number of positions taken.[15] Here I am interested in a particular aspect of the debate: a few scholars had begun to urge a recovery of the concept as it had been promulgated earlier or as the basis for a theory of the socialist state (Luo 2009), while others attacked the concept itself, whether in terms of its inherent flaws, its limited validity to the period of war against the counter-revolution, its tendency to move towards an autocratic populism that was

already espied with Lenin, or its dangers in light of the chaotic deviation of the "Cultural Revolution," in the sense that the slogan of "continuous revolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat" had led to autocratic tendencies, individual dictatorship, and the associated populism (Zhang X. 2003; Jin and Qin 2007; Lei 2012).

In reply, other scholars undertook careful and detailed studies of the development of the concept in the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin (Zhao and Tang 2014) and argued that the deviation of the "Cultural Revolution" should be understood properly and not detract from the concept itself (Zhou 2008). They also emphasised, in light of the historical experience of socialist countries, that the concept concerns the transition from capitalism to communism, that it is collective in the sense that it includes the vast majority of rural and urban workers, and that it entails a new form of socialist democracy (Yu 2002; Sun and Liu 2013; Liu 2014; Wang 2014). In short, significant effort was devoted to understanding the concept in all its dimensions, so as to counter leftist and especially rightist deviations and to ensure its continued place in the Marxist tradition. Engels would agree. In his terms, the commune cannot be separated from the dictatorship of the proletariat, for they are one and the same. The commune was the dictatorship in action, albeit for too short a time and hesitant to go further. Or, as the letter to Conrad Schmidt put it: the dictatorship of the proletariat is both political power and economic potency. It is socialist *Gewalt*.

### 3.3.2 Socialist *Gewalt*

The proletarian dictatorship is a concrete manifestation of what may be called socialist *Gewalt*. Engels speaks of this *Gewalt* in two ways, the first in terms of revolutionary action and the second as the actual exercise of power. Already in the 1840s, Engels was speaking of the achievement of communist aims by no other method than a "democratic, violent [*gewaltsame*] revolution" (Engels 1846b, 54; 1846a, 82). Through the 1870s, he often spoke of the right of the working class to "use violent force in order to realise [*mit Gewalt durchzusetzen*] its demands" (Engels 1873a, 309; 1873d, 449); indeed, it is "recognised that *Gewalt* also operates with revolutionary effect" (Engels 1878c, 35; 1878a, 610; see also 1874a, 381; 1874c, 629).

Engels's observations on the exercise of power after a revolution are more extensive. From a range of possible texts,[16] I would like to focus on a

work written in response to the "anti-authoritarian" push by the Anarchists, who even opposed participation by workers in political struggle. Engels writes: "A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing [*la cosa più autoritaria*]."[17] It requires the imposition of the will of majority of the population on the former ruling class by means of weapons, and, in order to ensure the success of the revolution, "it must maintain this rule by means of the terror [*terrore*] which its arms inspire in the reactionaries."[18] At this point, he invokes the Paris Commune, speaking not only of the "authority of the armed people [*autorità di populo armato*]," but also reproaching it for "not having used it freely enough" (Engels 1873b, 86; 1873e, 425). This is the sense in which we should read the observation in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (originally in *Anti-Dühring*): after observing the internal dynamic of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, Engels writes, "*The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into State property*" (Engels 1880b, 576; 1880a, 320).[19] The initial French of this text, "*la force publique*," is rendered in the German edition of 1891 as "*Staatsgewalt*" (Engels 1891b, 620). Or as he puts it even more clearly in material added to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

> *Proletarian Revolution*.—Solution of the contradictions. The proletariat seizes the public power [*pouvoir publique → öffentliche Gewalt*], and by means of this power [*pouvoir → Gewalt*] transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property (Engels 1880b, 580; 1880a, 325).

Engels's position on socialist *Gewalt* should by now be clear, as also its inescapable connection with the proletarian dictatorship and thereby the commune. Uncomfortable as it may be for some, Engels—like Marx—saw the need for violent force (*Gewalt*) in both the revolutionary process of seeking power and during the early exercise of power after such a revolution. The latter was for the sake of both transforming socio-economic conditions and dealing with counter-revolution. Engels also made explicit the connection between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Paris Commune, seeing the latter as part of the initial stage of communist construction while also providing glimpses of what the future might be.

Finally, socialist *Gewalt* is also connected with the “gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance” of the state.

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## 3.4 The Eventual Dying Away of the State

One of the more misunderstood and misrepresented concepts promoted by Engels concerns the “dying away” of the state.[20] In the brief space available here, I cannot provide all of the necessary background. Instead, I offer a summary and refer the reader to the exhaustive analysis in *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Boer 2021a, 54–79). My main concern here is to elaborate on Engels’s clarification that one of the last outcomes of socialist construction would be the falling away of the state.

### 3.4.1 Background Summary

The initial background concerns German socialist circles in the 184os, among which Engels and Marx moved. We find that while they spoke of the abolition (*Abschaffung*), annihilation (*Vernichtung*) and dialectical transformation (*Aufhebung*) of private property, money and inheritance, they rarely, if ever, spoke of doing so to the state as such. Instead, they envisioned alternative structures, either of a new state or of a new form of social organisation. This is true even of Proudhon, who deeply influenced these early German socialists. There is one notable exception: Max Stirner in his liberal anarchist work, *The Ego and Its Own* (1845a; 1845b), urged that the state should be completely abolished and annihilated. Thus, only when Engels and Marx (and others like Moses Hess) engaged with Stirner did they speak of the abolition of the state, finding Stirner’s proposals wanting since he focuses on an act of pure will.

It is only in 1850 that Engels (and Marx) speak directly of the “abolition [*Abschaffung*]” of the state for the first time (Engels 1850b; 1850a). Notably, this is a critical response to what had become a popular slogan in all manner of circles, including bourgeois ones where such an “abolition” entailed a bourgeois order in which they would be left alone to pursue their private gain. Crucially, this piece—which borrows the language of the slogan—identifies Stirner as the source and introduces the need for a delay in such an “abolition.” This delay is an early result of the method hammered out in the years before and expressed clearly for the first time in

the “Communist Manifesto” of 1848: the primary concern should be socio-economic matters. Thus, a communist revolution would have these as its main task, while any falling away of the state would follow as an outcome of such activity. This would be the position, refined and sharpened, that both Engels and Marx would hold in the struggle with Bakunin, who first formulated a somewhat coherent Anarchist position in the late 1860s and particularly in 1870s.

For Bakunin, the state was the prime cause and foundation of all exploitation and oppression, whether political or economic. Thus, the first task of a revolutionary movement upon attaining power should be to abolish (*Abschaffung*) the state, as a willed and conscious act. Bakunin struggled to show why the state should have this foundational role, at times connecting its quasi-sacred status with the role of the Christian church. But for Engels and Marx, this approach simply did not make sense: in light of their approach, the state was a secondary phenomenon, arising from economic conditions and class struggle. Thus, a communist revolution would need to enact wide-sweeping changes to the means and relations of production before aspects of the superstructure, such as the state, could be addressed. In this context, we find an increasing emphasis that one of the final results of the process of constructing socialism, after other tasks had been achieved and the counter-revolution had been defeated, would be not the “abolition” of the state, but its falling away, disappearance, going to sleep—the terms all appear in works of this time. Finally and as a way to sum up this position, Engels coined in the third edition of *Anti-Dühring* of 1894 the famous slogan: “the state is not abolished, it dies away.” It is to the clarification of this position in Engels’s later writings that I now turn.

### 3.4.2 Dying Away of Its Own Accord

In order to understand what Engels meant by the “dying away” of the state, I consider three key texts: a letter to August Bebel of 1875, an address after Marx’s death in 1883, and a passage from *Anti-Dühring*.

Engels’s letter to Bebel seeks to provide comments and suggestions on a draft of what became the Gotha Program, which united the Eisenach and Lasallean wings of the German parties into the United Social-Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany. Engels writes:

> The *people's state* has been flung in our teeth *ad nauseam* by the anarchists, although Marx's anti-Proudhon piece and after it the *Communist Manifesto* declare outright that, with the introduction of the socialist order of society, the state will dissolve of itself and disappear [*sich von selbst auflöst und verschwindet*]. Now, since the state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one's enemies by force [*gewaltsam*]… so long as the proletariat still makes use of the state, it makes use of it, not for the purpose of freedom, but of keeping down its enemies and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist [*hört der Staat als solcher auf zu bestehen*] (Engels 1875a, 6–7; 1875b, 71).

Note the terminology used: dissolve (*auflösen*), disappear (*verschinden*), and cease to exist (*aufhören zu bestehen*). The emphasis here is on an objective process instead of a willed act of abolition (*Abschaffung*). Only when conditions are met—summed up as a "socialist order of society"—would the state begin to dissolve. Until then, it would be necessary to use the structures of the state, to exercise *Gewalt* so as to deal with class enemies and the counter-revolution. Historical experience would come to show that such enemies exist both within and without a socialist country, and that this would be so during the long period of the co-existence of and struggle between capitalist and socialist countries.

The second relevant text is "On the Death of Karl Marx," in which Engels writes:

> Marx and I, ever since 1845, have held the view that *one* of the final results [*eine der schließlichen Folgen*] of the future proletarian revolution will be the gradual dissolution [*allmälige Auflösung*][21] of that political organisation called *the State*; an organisation the main object of which has ever been to secure, by armed force, the economical subjection of the working majority to the wealthy minority. With the disappearance of a wealthy minority the necessity for an armed repressive State-force [*bewaffneten Unterdrückungs- oder Staatsgewalt*] disappears [*verschwindet*] also. At the same time we have always held, that in order to arrive at this and the other, far more important ends of the social revolution of the future, the

> proletarian class will first have to possess itself of the organised political force [*organisirte politische Gewalt*] of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society (Engels 1883c, 419; 1883b, 477–478).

Once again, note the words used: gradual dissolution (*allmälige Auflösung*) and disappear (*verschwinden*). Most significantly, this is only *one* of the final results (*eine der schließlichen Folgen*), at the end of the revolutionary process and indeed at the end of the long process of constructing socialism. Far more important are other tasks: see off the counter-revolution, stamp out the resistance of the capitalist class, and reorganise society along socialist lines. This is in direct contrast with the Anarchists, who assert that the first task of a proletarian revolution is to abolish (*Abschaffung*) the state. Note also the opening statement: both Engels and Marx had held such a position already since 1845. In the previous quotation (from the letter to Bebel), Engels's mentioned Marx's critique of Proudhon from 1847, as well as the Manifesto from 1848, where —he maintains—he and Marx had already held to such a position. In his piece on Marx, he refers to 1845, the time when they were first working together and produced *The Holy Family* and had begun working on *The German Ideology*. In these earlier works, the articulation of the position on the state's final dissolution, as one of the final results of socialist construction, may not have been quite as clear as Engels suggests. But the point is that such a position is consistent with the whole method that he and Marx had developed: socio-economic forces are primary and the state (along with other features, such as philosophy, culture, ideology and religion) are secondary. In other words, the forces and relations of production are the main concern, so only when they had been dealt with by various means of revolutionary action would it be possible to consider secondary phenomena such as the state. As Engels wrote to Theodor Cuno, who was toying with Anarchist ideas: "We, on the contrary, say: Abolish [*schafft … ab*] capital, the appropriation of all the means of production by the few, and the state will fall of itself [*so fällt der Staat von selbst*]" (Engels 1872a, 388; 1872b, 306). This position flows from the whole approach Engels and Marx had developed.

The third and final text comes from the third edition of *Anti-Dühring*, where Engels uses for the first time *abstirben*, die away, to capture all of the

usages we have noted: dissolve, disappear, cease to exist and fall away of itself. Given its importance, I quote the text in full:

> As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force [*eine besondre Repressionsgewalt*], a state, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—this is, at the same time, its last independent act [*sein letzter selbständiger Akt*] as a state. State interference [*Eingreifen*] in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then falls asleep of itself [*schläft dann von selbst ein*]; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production [*die Verwaltung von Sachen und die Leitung von Produktionsprozessen*]. The state is not "abolished." *It dies out* [*Der Staat wird nicht "abgeschafft,"* er stirbt ab]. This gives the measure of the value of the phrase "a free people's state," both as to its justifiable use at times by agitators, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency; and also of the demands of the so-called anarchists that the state should be abolished overnight [*von heute auf morgen abgeschafft werden*] (Engels 1894b, 534–535; 1894a, 268).[22]

This quotation not only sums up Engels's theory of hitherto existing of forms of the state (see Sect. 4.2), but it also offers a narrative of the state's gradual dying away (*abstirben*). By now it should be obvious that communism by no means advocates the *Abschaffung* of the state immediately or even soon after a proletarian revolution. Instead, the path to the state's falling asleep or dying away is long, arduous, and full of twists and turns. Engels's speaks of class rule in a capitalist state, the anarchy (note the term) of capitalist production, collisions and excesses in the economy, and increasing class conflict. Only when this conflict reaches the point of a proletarian revolution can the state be deployed by the vast

majority of workers to take control of the means of production on behalf of society—again note the emphasis.

A question arises: what happens to the state when it ceases to be a separated public power, a special repressive force, acting independently and interfering in the economy and society? The fundamental alienation (to use an earlier Hegelian term) between state and society so characteristic of capitalism and the bourgeois state, will die away. Thus, the state itself, as a separate public power, dies away. What is to come in its place? The key phrase is the "administration of things and the management of the production process," to which I now turn.

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## 3.5 Towards Enmeshed Socialist Governance

Finally, we come to the nature of socialist governance after a proletarian revolution and the long road of socialist construction. That both Engels and Marx saw that such governance is necessary should be clear by now. As to what it might entail, Engels in particular offers basic principles rather than extensive prescriptions. The basic principles may be summarised as follows: public *Gewalt* loses its political character and stands in the midst of society, becoming the administration of the stuff of life and the conduct of forces and relations of production for the genuine good of society. In what follows I analyse each of the key terms of this brief statement.

### 3.5.1 Public *Gewalt* Standing in the Midst of Society

To begin with, public *Gewalt* will continue under socialism, but as an unseparated or integrated form of governance. To clarify: Engels had defined hitherto existing forms of the state as a "separated public *Gewalt*," with the operative word being "separated." It follows that if a public *Gewalt* is also be present in socialism, then it must be in an unseparated form. At a number of points, both Engels and Marx speak of the need for social functions or public functions in a socialist system, even to the point of being analogous to governing functions of the state (Engels 1873b, 86; 1873e, 425; Marx 1875c, 21–22; 1875a, 95). These may be seen as alternative expressions of the need for a public *Gewalt*.

Another way of describing this integrated public *Gewalt* is that it is a "social organisation [*Gesellschaftsorganisation*]" that stands "in the midst of society [*eben mitten in der Gesellschaft*]" (Engels 1892a, 195, 265;

1892b, 190, 270). This suggestion comes from a somewhat unexpected source: Engels's extensive study of "pre-state" formations that drew much of his energy in the 1870s and 1880s. I cannot go into all of the details here, save to note that these forms of administration and governance were highly complex: a) multiple levels of councils were elected by popular assemblies in a system that may be described as "naturally evolved democracy [*naturwüchsige Demokratie*] (Engels 1892a, 211; 1892b, 210); b) elections themselves were direct at the lower levels and indirect at higher levels of representative councils; c) social, military, and religious leaders were elected and subject to recall; d) these layers of social organisation undertook a wide range of administrative functions, from the management of land in common, through promulgating communal norms and dealing with wrongdoing, to adopting strangers and stipulating funeral and burial rites. Clearly, this social organisation—or public *Gewalt*—was complex and many-layered. However, it cannot be called a state, in the sense of a separated public *Gewalt*. Instead, it was an "organisation of a society [*die Organisation einer Gesellschaft*] which as yet knows no state [*noch keinen Staat kennt*]" (Engels 1892a, 204; 1892b, 201). It was not separated from but stood in the midst of society.

This is all very well, based as it was on the available historical and anthropological material of the time, but what relevance does it have for the enmeshed governance of socialism, let alone communism? To answer this question, let us turn to a remarkable work entitled "The Mark" (Engels 1882a; 1882e).[23] Engels aims to provide a "short historical sketch" of how German peasants gradually lost their collective sovereignty over their land and how it may be recovered. This narrative begins with collective ownership, brought with the German tribes in their eastward migration, and runs through Roman, medieval (Carolingian), and early modern capitalist periods. Two inter-related lines run through the text: one speaks of the gradual extension of private property, indebtedness, and loss of peasant "rights"; the other repeatedly points out that the practices and assumptions of the Mark run too deep in German consciousness and practice for them to be eradicated completely. These practices included the periodic reallocation of commonly owned field shares; common holding of woods, pastures, and minerals found in the soil beneath the level of a ploughshare; the threefold pattern of village crop-growing in which one of three fields was always fallow and thus common property for pasturage of animals; the common

use of all other land, from forests and rivers to roads and fishing grounds. Engels also gives detailed attention to social organisation through the "Mark assembly [*Markversammlung*]," which concerned legislation, administration, and jurisdiction within the mark.

It is the second narrative line that interests Engels most, for he seeks to reconstruct these practices for the sake of the communist project. The point—directed explicitly at peasant farmers—is that the communism of the future would entail a dialectical transformation (*Aufhebung*) of this baseline communism. Pointing out that the peasants are at last able to act to improve their own conditions, along with the workers, Engels writes:

> But how?—By means of a rebirth [*Wiedergeburt*] of the mark, not in its old, outdated [*überlebten*] form, but in a rejuvenated [*verjüngten*] form: by a renewal [*Erneuerung*] of common landownership [*Bodengemeinschaft*] under which the latter would not only provide the small-peasant community with all the prerogatives of big farming and the use of agricultural machinery, but will also give them means to organise, along with agriculture, major industries utilising steam and water power, and to organise them without capitalists by the community itself (Engels 1891c, 330).[24]

Far from a hankering for the rural socialism of the European Middle Ages, or for an idealised "primitive communism," or even for a secularised version of the religious return to Paradise, this dialectical transformation would both negate this baseline communism and transform its core features into a qualitatively different reality. Communist forms of social and economic organisation in future would, in Engels's opinion, not entail an entire destruction of the old and a completely new beginning (as the Anarchists were wont to suggest); instead, it would involve a dialectical transformation of earlier moments of human history.

### 3.5.2 Depoliticised Governance

Further, a socialist public *Gewalt* would lose its "political character." Engels writes: "All socialists are agreed that the political state [*Stato politico*], and with it political authority [*l'autorità politica*], will disappear [*scompariranno*] as a result of the coming social revolution, that is, that public functions [*funzioni pubbliche*] will lose their political character

[*carattere politico*]" (Engels 1873b, 86; 1873e, 425).[25] But what, exactly, is political character? It means the reality of class struggle and its manifestation in the state. As the "Communist Manifesto" observes, "Political *Gewalt*, properly so called, is merely the organised *Gewalt* of one class for oppressing another." It follows that when, "class distinctions have disappeared" the "public *Gewalt* will lose its political character [*den politischen Charakter*]" (Marx and Engels 1848a, 482; 1848b, 505). As Panitch observes (1980, 127), Engels and Marx "meant not the end of public authority in society, but the end of class repression as embodied in the state." Given the framework of the thought of both Engels and Marx, this would be one of the final results of the process of socialist construction, although—from historical experience—glimpses of this reality can already be seen at earlier stages.

A concrete example of socialist *Gewalt* without the political character of class struggle concerns non-politicised elections. Is this possible? For those unfortunate enough to have been born and raised in the context of capitalist democracy, elections are assumed to be antagonistic, to be the regulated form of class struggle in terms of political parties vying for power. Witness the way every item—from health to international relations—becomes a political football, a way of scoring points against opponents, and results in the constant to-and-fro of policy implementation and its undoing. It follows that since class conflict is not to be a feature of socialist society, elections would not have the antagonistic nature of capitalist systems.

Let us turn to Marx for an initial proposal concerning the possibility of non-politicised elections. In his notes on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, Marx observes that the nature of elections depends on the economic foundation and on the economic relations between voters. If these economic relations are antagonistic, and if classes have formed and are engaged in class struggle, then elections will have a "political character." By contrast, if economic relations are not antagonistic, then the functions of governance cease to be "political." Now comes the crucial point: by an absence of "political" functions Marx means that there are "no ruling functions [*keine Regierungsfunktion*]." In other words, "the distribution of general functions has become a routine matter [*Geschäftssache*] which entails no domination [*keine Herrschaft*]." The outcome is that "elections have nothing [*hat nichts*] of today's political character [*politischen Charakter*]" (Marx 1875b,

635; 1875d, 519–520). In sum, without the context of antagonistic economic relations and class conflict, which are characteristic of the capitalist state and its form of democracy, elections will lose, will have nothing of, such a political character.

### 3.5.3 Administering the Stuff of Life for the True Interests of Society

Thus far, we have considered the nature of a socialist public *Gewalt* that stands in the midst of society and is depoliticised. The third principle concerns the administration of things and managing production.[26] A number of statements to this effect appear from the 1870s onwards, emphasising the need for efficient administration of *Sachen* and *Dingen*, the stuff of life, or the matters or things that pertain to human existence. The tasks here are "simple administrative functions [*simples fonctions administratives*]," or more elaborately, "the rule over people is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of production processes [*die Verwaltung von Sachen und die Leitung von Produktionsprozessen*]" (Marx and Engels 1872b, 49–50; 1872a, 121; Engels 1894b, 535; 1894a, 268).[27] Although such administration would, in light of historical experience, turn out to be far more complex than either Engels or Marx anticipated, it clearly follows from the depoliticised nature of a public *Gewalt* in a socialist system.

Finally, what is the purpose of administering the stuff of human existence? As Engels puts it in "On Authority" (1873b, 86; 1873e, 425), "public functions will lose their political character and be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society [*semplici funzioni amministrative, veglianti ai veri interessi sociali*]." Watching over or guarding the true social interests, or as the later German translation has it, "*die wahren sozialen Interessen hüten*" (Engels 1873h, 308). For Engels, and indeed Marx, this is precisely what depoliticisation means: when public *Gewalt* no longer has a political character, it serves the common of good of the collective. Or, to put it more philosophical terms, for communism the common good is paramount.

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## 3.6 Concluding Observation

To sum up, Engels's basic principles concerning the nature of socialist governance are as follows: (1) Public power (*Gewalt*) continues, although it would not be separated from but stand in the midst of society; (2) Since it is not based on class conflict, it would lose its "political character"; (3) Governance entails the administration of things and the management of the processes of production for the sake of the true interests of society; (4) This reality may be seen as a dialectical transformation, an *Aufhebung* of baseline communism. In light of the chapters to follow, arising from the actual practice of socialist governance, the question of continuity and discontinuity arises. On this matter it is important to strike a realistic balance: to suggest that Engels and indeed Marx foresaw, or perhaps should have foreseen, all of the developments in later efforts to construct socialism is simply unrealistic; to propose that later historical realities departed significantly from the original thoughts of the founders is even more extreme and not sustained by the evidence. Far better is a balanced approach. Thus, there is clearly significant continuity, much more than one might expect, between the initial philosophical foundations and the historical realities of socialist governance. At the same time, in the actual construction of socialism, from the Soviet Union to China, one would expect to face new problems for which new solutions were and are needed —albeit based on the initial principles and the method through which they were derived. As Engels put it in 1890, "So-called 'socialist society' is not, in my view, to be regarded as something that remains crystallised for all time, but rather being in process of constant change and transformation [*in fortwährender Verändrung und Umbildung*] like all other social conditions" (Engels 1890b, 447; 1890d, 18).

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# Footnotes

1 References to *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* are taken from the fourth German edition of 1892, since it contains much additional material compared with the first edition of 1884.

2 We already find the terminology of “öffentliche Gewalt” in “Zur Wohnungsfrage” (Engels 1873i, 72).

3 The economic determination of the state is also emphasised in Engels’s study of Feuerbach (Engels 1886c, 158; 1886b, 291–393).

4 In *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (1892a, 263; 1892b, 269) emphasises the internal processes of class conflict that led to the emergence of the state, but in "The Frankish Period" he writes of "state power [*Staatsgewalt*]" in the German Mark association, which "did not derive from these communities but confronted them as something alien" (Engels 1882b, 353; 1882d, 59).

5 Note here also the comment in Engels's introduction to Borkheim's pamphlet concerning the 1848 revolutions: "the state is becoming more and more estranged from the masses of the people and is now well on the way to transforming itself into a consortium of landowners, stockbrokers and big industrialists for the exploitation of the people" (Engels 1887a, 53; 1887b, 450).

6 The (semi-)autonomous line of subsequent Western Marxist scholarship has a number of varying emphases (Offe 1974; 1984; Esping-Andersen, Friedland, and Wright 1976; Holloway and Picciotto 1978; Skocpol 1979; Block 1980; Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; Evans 1995), while the instrumentalist position has been pursued by a smaller number (Sweezy 1942; Miliband 1969; Baran and Sweezy 1966; Domhoff 1979; Berberoglu 2005).

7 The closest that subsequent Western Marxist analyses have come to this approach is to suggest that the capitalist state—divided between apparatus and power—functions to provide a relatively stable environment for capital by ameliorating and regulating class struggle, economic crises, and uneven development (Mandel 1975; Poulantzas 1978a; 1978b; Therborn 1978; Wright 1978; Jessop 1982; Przeworski 1985).

8 The essay "Role of Force" was planned as the fourth chapter to an independent work that would include the three chapters on the same theme from a section of *Anti-Dühring.* Although the volume was eventually published (Engels 1946), along with a belated English translation (Engels 1968), the essay is treated as an independent work in critical scholarship.

9 Elsewhere, Engels argues that the bourgeoisie's rise was intimately connected with the rise of absolute monarchies (Engels 1884b; 1884a), a process that also entailed the "bourgeoisification" of older feudal classes since the economic conditions were increasingly determined by bourgeois norms (Engels 1873i, 52–54; 1873f, 362–364). Here a contradiction arises: although the republic was the ultimate form of bourgeois rule, it was reluctant to embrace a republic at first due to a reluctance to face up to the working class (Engels 1873c; 1873g).

10 For a full list of citations concerning Engels's usage, see *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Boer 2021a, 17–18).

11 Here Engels uses *Macht* when speaking of power and strength. Although not as frequent as *Gewalt* in the texts under consideration, we should note: when the emphasis falls on power per se, Engels prefers to use *Macht*; when the more forceful and violent sense is to the forefront, he tends to use *Gewalt* and its associated terms.

12 The original manuscript had "*sozialdemokratische Philister* [Social-Democratic philistine]," which the editors of *Die Neue Zeit* replaced with "*deutsche Philister* [German philistine].".

13 Note also the analogy between social and natural forces (*Kräfte*). In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels describes the latter as working "blindly, violently [*gewaltsam*], destructively [*zerstörend*]," but only when we do not understand them. When we do, we are able to "subject them more and more to our own will [*unserm Willen zu unterwerfen*]" so that we can attain "our own ends [*unsre Zweck*]." So also with social and economic forces: once we "grasp [*begriffen*]" them, they can "be transformed [*verwandelt werden*]" from "demonic masters into willing servants" (Engels 1894b, 534; 1894a, 266).

14 See the strong rejection of such tendencies and their misrepresentations of the Soviet Union in Tang Desen's study (2012).

15 An earlier wave of debate turned on two key documents between 1975 and 1981. The first was a biased collection of texts from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which was published in 1975 under the auspices of the "Gang of Four" and sought to bolster the slogan of "continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Renmin Ribao editors and Hongqi editors 1975). The second was the all-important resolution adopted at the sixth session of the CPC's Eleventh Central Committee, which criticised the slogan and its practice while upholding Mao Zedong Thought and the manifestation of the proletarian dictatorship in the democratic dictatorship (CPC Central Committee 1981). Scholars moved from endorsing the first, to criticising its promulgation by the "Gang of Four," to reassessment in light of the 1981 resolution. I give a sample from among many articles relating to these evolving positions (Xiao 1975; Shu 1979; Cheng 1980; Leng 1984).

16 A number of other texts make similar points (Engels 1871d, 307; 1871b, 416; 1871c, 308; 1871a, 417; Marx and Engels 1872d, 96; 1872c, 175; Engels 1886a, 169; 1886d, 406).

17 The German translation of the original Italian article has "*das autoritärste Ding*" (Engels 1873h, 308).

18 For "*terrore*" the German translation has "*Schrecken*," with the senses of fright, horror and terror (Engels 1873h, 308). See also: the working class must possess "the organised political force of the State [*die organisirte politische Gewalt des Staates*]' so as to "trample down [*niederstampfen*]" capitalist class resistance—the counter-revolution—and "organise society anew [*die Gesellschaft neu organisieren*]" (Engels 1883c, 419).

19 Emphasis in original.

20 To give some examples of such misrepresentations: Engels (and Marx) were quasi-anarchists, who believed in the *Abschaffung* (abolition) of the state (Kelsen 1949, 12; Tucker 1967); they initially shared a general abolitionist stance but later clarified their position in response to Bakunin and the Anarchists (Draper 1970, 283–284; 1990, 107–111); they were authoritarians and only toyed with the idea of the state's abolition (Adamiak 1970); or the state would "wither away" (the common English term) very soon after a proletarian revolution, when class conflict would disappear and with it the state (Medalie 1959; Hunt 1984, 231–246).

21 The section quoted here has a somewhat complex history. It was initially drafted by Engels in English, in a letter to Philipp van Patten, but published first in German (also by Engels's hand) in *Der Sozialdemocrat* 21, 17 May, 1883. In the English draft, the text emphasises the point even further with "the gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance" of the State (Engels 1883a, 10). However, not only did the German version of the letter appear first (Engels 1883a), but the text on Marx's death also was itself written in German, where Engels offers "*allmälige Auflösung* [gradual dissolution].".

22 A little earlier in the same work, Engels writes: "The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property. But, in doing this, it sublates itself [*hebt es sich selbst*] as proletariat, sublates [*hebt … auf*] all class distinctions and class antagonisms, [sublates] also the state as state" (Engels 1894b, 534).

23 This work was part of a larger project that sought to develop a historical materialist analysis of German history from the earliest records (Roman) to the present, with a particular interest in the pre-state formations of baseline communism. Given the pressures of other commitments, most of the work remained unfinished (Engels 1882f; 1882c; 1882b; 1882d; 1884b; 1884a).

24 This final section first appeared in the edition published in *Sozialdemokrat* in 1883. It appeared in all subsequent editions, including the 1891 appendix to the German edition of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Since this final section does not appear in the text provided by *MEGA* (I.27), I have quoted from the *Werke*, which provides the 1891 edition.

25 The German translation from the Italian reads: “die öffentlichen Funktionen ihren politischen Charakter verlieren und sich in einfache administrative Funktionen verwandeln werden, die die wahren sozialen Interessen hüten” (Engels 1873h, 308).

26 The concept of the “administration of things” has a somewhat complex history. A comparable thought was expressed by Auguste Comte: “le gouvernement des choses remplace celui des hommes,” the government of things replaces that of human beings (Comte 1822, 102–103). The idea is often attributed to Comte’s teacher, Saint-Simon, but note the difference from Engels: while Comte speaks of the “government of things” as a replacement for governing human beings, Engels writes of the “administration of things”—*Verwaltung*, with the sense of administering or managing—for the good of society (Boer 2021a, 97–98).

27 Liberals—including those with a Marxist veneer—have wilfully misrepresented the idea of the administration of things, suggesting that it reveals a technocratic and authoritarian approach in which human beings become “things” to be managed (Arendt 1961, 19–20; Harding 1984; Aron 2002, 175; Berlin 2002, 85, 166). By contrast, for Engels it is not the management of human beings as “things,” but the administration of the stuff of life for the “true interests of society.”.

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# 4. Lenin, Before and After October

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## 4.1 Opening Remarks

With Lenin, we reach a crucial turning point, from before October to after October, from socialism seeking power to socialism in power. As Lenin observed in the early days after the revolutionary seizure of power, the "October 25 Revolution has transferred the question … from the sphere of theory to the sphere of practice" (Lenin 1917j, 289; 1917b, 89). So important is this passage over the threshold of political power that I have organised the chapter's structure as follows. The first part deals with material from before the October Revolution, especially *The State and Revolution*, identifying Lenin's key thoughts on the state, political power, and socialist democracy. This material, however, remains theoretical and is based on the interpretation of texts by Engels and Marx. The second part presents historical material concerning the early structures of emerging Soviet power, identifying some key transitions that were already in evidence: the institutionalisation of structures such as the soviets; the growing reality of Communist Party leadership; and the rapid growth of proletarian democracy. Obviously, this material marks the shift to the actual exercise of power. The third part is of most interest. Based on "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power," I analyse Lenin's emphasis on administration and governance, which may be seen as a direct interpretation, based on practice, of the "administration of things" for the sake of production and distribution for the true interests of society. Lenin

emphasises that the task requires iron discipline by the Communist Party, leadership and training of the masses of workers and peasants by the vanguard of class-conscious workers, and the associated flourishing of proletarian democracy. As Chinese scholars emphasise, in this material we can detect a shift from Lenin's more idealistic expectations before the October Revolution to the sober realities of the immense difficulties of constructing socialism in a war-torn and broken country (Rong and Lai 2000, 16–18; Liu and Lu 2004; Cai 2011; Yan 2014).[1] The conclusion addresses the problem of what has happened to the state and its "dying away" or "withering," and identifies an unexpected manifestation of this process from the first moments after a proletarian revolution.

In light of the transition from theory to practice, which Lenin experienced in his revolutionary life, I do need to raise here a crucial question: it is a commonplace in some corners of Marxist scholarship that Marx and Engels expected a proletarian revolution in the most "advanced" capitalist countries, when the contradictions of a capitalist system and the associated class conflict have reached a crisis point and require a sublation (*Aufhebung*) through revolution. We can cite here the conventional theoretical points from Marx concerning the "two inevitabilities and two impossibilities,"[2] or Engels's influential depiction in *Anti-Dühring* of the increasing exacerbation of capitalist contradictions leading to a proletarian revolution (Engels 1894b, 532–535; 1894a, 266–268). But a question remains: did Marx and Engels ever say directly that proletarian revolutions must take place in over-developed capitalist contexts? The evidence would suggest otherwise. To begin with, they both saw anti-colonial struggles for national liberation as an inescapable feature of the struggle against capitalism and thus as a species of class struggle (Losurdo 2016, 7–52). Many are the incisive articles written on China, India, Ireland, and other struggles, so much so that collections have been published on such topics (Marx 1951; Marx and Engels 1971; 1972; 2006). Further, the encounter with Russian communists in the 1880s brought both of them to realise—not without some struggle—that a proletarian revolution and socialist construction may follow different paths than the one in capitalist countries. The most notable moment of this realisation is Marx's drawn-out effort to respond to such a question from Vera Zasulich (Marx 1881c; 1881a; 1881e; 1881d; 1881b). We will also see in the next chapter that it was through debates on the national question in Russia that Lenin and especially Stalin

came to see anti-colonial struggles as a major part of the struggle against capitalism, and indeed a manifestation of the global revolution.

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## 4.2 Before October: On the State and Socialist Democracy

In terms of pre-revolutionary texts, the *locus classicus* for Lenin's thoughts on the state is *The State and Revolution*. Written in hiding and on the eve of the October Revolution, this incomplete work continues to be deeply influential in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Alongside this work, there are also some important deliberations on what "democracy" meant and what socialist democracy might mean. Throughout, we need to keep in mind that all of this material comes from a time comparable to that of Marx and Engels, when the communist movement was still searching for political power through a proletarian revolution.

The times were comparable at another level: for Marx and Engels it was the Prussian Empire, rendering the German states the most "backward" in Europe, while for Lenin it was the tzarist regime in its last days. In other words, the context was characterised by the last gasp of an absolutist or autocratic regime and the emerging contours of a capitalist state. It was a multi-layered reality, with the incommensurate conjunction of older, feudal forms of the state and the increasing reality of what would become the modern capitalist state. I put it in this way so as to emphasise the common ground from which they worked. True, the contours of a capitalist system were perhaps more developed in Germany, although Marx and Engels were acutely conscious of the fact that the German states lagged behind the rest of Europe in capitalist development until Bismarck enabled a dialectical leap that brought Germany to the forefront. And Lenin did his best to argue that capitalism had already emerged in Russia so as to find ground for Marxist analysis and struggle (Lenin 1899a; 1899b). Even if this was the case, it took place under the auspices of an autocratic tzarist regime. Olgin provides a succinct picture of how the regime was viewed, quoting the conservative theorist Katkov:

> The Russian Tzar, in the opinion of the theorists of absolutism, is not only a supreme, unlimited and unhampered ruler; he is more. "All power has its derivation from God," says Katkov, "the Russian

> Tzar, however, was granted a special significance distinguishing him from the rest of the world's rulers. He is not only the Tzar of his land and the leader of his people, he is designated by God to be the guardian and custodian of the Orthodox Church. The Russian Tzar is more than an heir to his ancestors, he is a successor to the Caesars of the Eastern Empire, the builders of the Church and its conclaves, the founders of the very Creed of the Faith of Christ. With the fall of Byzantium, Moscow arose and the grandeur of Russia began. Herein lies the mystery of the deep distinction between Russia and all the nations of the world" (Olgin 1917, 58).

Of course, the last days of this system were characterised by war-time losses, economic and social breakdown, a rampant secret police, and the ebb and flow of revolution.

### 4.2.1 The State and Revolution

Lenin's reflections in *The State and Revolution* took place in this context. He turned to Marx and especially Engels to develop some insights as to what might await the Bolsheviks in the immediate future. After quoting from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Lenin makes the following points: (1) the "state is a product and a manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms," and this "antagonism objectively *cannot* be reconciled"; (2) the state is "a power which arose from society but places itself above and alienates itself more and more from it"; (3) the state becomes in the hands of the bourgeoisie "an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another"; (4) the oppressed class must not and cannot take over the existing state apparatus but must overcome and destroy "the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class"; (5) since the existing state functions as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, it "must be replaced by a 'special coercive force' for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)"; (6) when all former enemies have been vanquished (or absorbed), the state is no longer necessary and will wither away (Lenin 1917d, 6–22; 1917i, 391–406).[3]

The continuity with Engels, and indeed Marx, is obvious. To begin with, the state—as it had existed thus far in human history—arises from class conflict and is separated and alienated from society. Lenin takes this key

thesis a step further by stressing that the state is unable to reconcile or solve the class antagonisms that produced the state in the first place, and that the very existence of the state is evidence that such antagonisms are irreconcilable. On this matter, Lenin makes an important distinction: while Engels wrote of the state "alleviating" class conflict within the bounds of an "order" that is itself a form of class oppression, Lenin points out that alleviation is by no means the same as "reconciling" class conflict. The state cannot reconcile a conflict that is the very reason for its existence. Second, what does Lenin mean when he writes of the state being an "organ of the rule of a definite class"? While one may be tempted to see here an instrumentalist view, in which the state is a neutral tool in the hands of the ruling class, Lenin follows the main emphasis of Engels (see the previous chapter) in assuming that the ruling class—in this case the bourgeoisie—imposes its own order on society, asserts the universality of its own values, cements a specific economic system in place, curtails the range of political positions and debate so as to contain class conflict, and seeks to crush those who struggle to overthrow the system itself.[4]

Third, Lenin is even clearer than Engels or Marx concerning the need for violent force, for revolutionary violence, in overthrowing the old system. As for the existing state, Lenin speaks of "destruction" of this state, that it must be "broken, smashed," that the proletariat should be focused on "smashing and destroying" the machinery of the bourgeois state (Lenin 1917d, 28, 31; 1917i, 411, 414).[5] And the working class in power would need a "special coercive force," which he defines as "an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class" (Lenin 1917d, 24; 1917i, 407). The class to be suppressed is, of course, the bourgeoisie. This realistic assessment arose not merely from the direct experience of the tzarist regime's violent suppression of peasant protests, worker unrest, and the activities of the various socialist and communist parties; it was also the result of the shock of being unable to advise and assist the revolt on the battleship Potemkin in 1905.[6] In light of this incident, the Bolsheviks delved into Engels's works on military matters,[7] realising that to be serious about revolution meant establishing and training an armed force. After this experience, Lenin wrote that a "military force of the revolutionary people" needed: "(1) the armed proletariat and peasantry, (2) organised advance detachments of representatives of these classes, and (3) sections of the army that are prepared to come over to the side of the people. It is all this taken

together that constitutes a *revolutionary army*" (Lenin 1905f, 365; 1905 l, 366–367).[8]

Finally, all of this has a direct bearing on the "withering away" of the state. Lenin is at pains to argue that the exercise of revolutionary force, of violence and terror against reactionaries and the counter-revolution, means that the withering away of the state has nothing to do with the proletarian revolution itself. After the seizure of power, the "special coercive force" of the proletariat must be brought to bear. What then does the "withering away" of the state mean? Here Lenin introduces a crucial distinction, between the bourgeois state and the proletarian state. The former, he suggests in this pre-revolutionary work, will be abolished forthwith during a violent proletarian revolution; the latter, however, will wither away in due course after it has achieved its manifold tasks. Violent revolution for the bourgeois state; withering away for the proletarian state (dictatorship of the proletariat). When would the latter take place? In light of post-October realities, Lenin would come to observe that "national and state differences among peoples and countries … will continue to exist for a very, very long time [*ochen' i ochen' dolgo*] even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale" (Lenin 1920a, 77; 1920b, 92). By now, I have leapt ahead to the situation of socialism in power, so I leave that discussion to later in the chapter.

### 4.2.2 Socialist Democracy

In Lenin's pre-revolutionary writings, democracy also looms large. The term has three main senses.[9] First, it is seen as bourgeois democracy and is a significant component of the "bourgeois-democratic revolution," which was generally agreed to have taken place in Russia between the 1905 revolution and the February revolution of 1917. For Lenin, the historical value of bourgeois democracy lay in its struggle against the relics of feudalism and absolutism, and he argued for the need to exploit bourgeois reforms—through the press and freedom of assembly—to promote the Bolshevik platform (Lenin 1894a, 300–301; 1894b, 290–291; 1919l, 21; 1919g, 272). He also argued that a bourgeois-democratic republic would intensify class conflict and accelerate the process towards a proletarian revolution. In the context of intensified class conflict, Lenin distinguished even more sharply between the illusory and deceptive promises of

bourgeois democracy and the superiority of socialist democracy (Lenin 1905j, 7–19; 1905i, 281–292; 1905b; 1905p).

Second, the more common usage of “democracy” is in terms of the broader socialist project. In this sense, democracy has a distinct class and thus revolutionary character. Here we need to note that the loan word “democracy” was more often associated with the labouring masses of workers and peasants, especially during the revolutionary period from 1905 to 1917. Democracy thus became synonymous with the range of socialist parties, while those of the bourgeoisie (Kadets) and the old aristocracy (Octobrists and others) were anti-democratic (Kolonitskii 2004). This sense of “democracy” appears in Lenin’s advocacy for a coalition with other socialist parties in the initial phases of the proletarian revolution, since democratic and socialist struggles—as class based—are inseparably connected in the political struggle (Lenin 1897b, 445–451; 1897a, 328–333; see also 1902a, 78–95; 1902b, 421–435; 1905e, 318; 1905c, 187).[10] During the tumultuous year of 1917, this type of democracy was embodied in the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies—hence the revolutionary slogan of “all power to the Soviets.” Of course, the Bolsheviks should be in the vanguard, leading such a coalition of revolutionary-democratic parties in completing the democratic revolution, since true revolutionary democracy should lead to a socialist revolution and should not be seduced by the compromises entailed in “bourgeois democratic phrases” (Lenin 1905a; 1905k; 1917e, 190–194; 1917h, 360–364).

The third sense of “democracy” will set the stage for Lenin’s post-revolutionary developments: “democracy” is in itself a socialist project, with the specific sense of a complete and consistent democratisation that would lead to its own demise. Thus, in Lenin’s hands socialist democracy has both a minimal and a maximal sense: at the minimal level, it designates all socialist parties and their struggle against the old aristocracy and especially the bourgeoisie with its form of bourgeois democracy; in its maximal sense, proletarian or socialist democracy means the democracy advocated by communists. At this point, we reach the limit of Lenin’s pre-revolutionary reflections on democracy, although I will take up the question again when analysing the post-October situation.

### 4.2.3 Summary

In this initial section on Lenin's pre-October reflections, I have dealt with Lenin's influential material on the state, with a focus on the nature and functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the initial stage of socialism, as well as his usages of "democracy" and what socialist democracy might be. As I have mentioned, all this remained—like Marx and Engels—at the level of theory. In the revolutionary experience of the October Revolution and the initial steps of Soviet power, the theory was immediately put to the test and revised in light of practice. It is to this historical threshold that I now turn.

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## 4.3 Threshold: The Early Structures of Soviet Power

After October, the initial years of Soviet power saw immense innovation and development in the practices of governance. In considering this material, we need to keep three factors in mind. First, it is important to avoid a specious and idealistic interpretation, in which Marx—usually with reference to his euphoric description of the Paris Commune—sets a blueprint against which the measures of the Bolsheviks are found wanting. Second, and related, is the betrayal narrative much favoured in certain circles influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition (think of Judas Iscariot). This betrayal narrative bedevils much (Western) Marxist story-telling, in which Lenin and the Bolsheviks somehow betrayed their ideals and thus Marx and Engels. Third, the Bolsheviks faced a failed state. Years of war, periodic famine, social unrest, conflict, and violence, had led to systemic breakdown. Russia faced the real prospect of disintegrating altogether. Indeed, at the nadir of the foreign-sponsored and counter-revolutionary "civil" war only a rump of the old Russia remained under the control of the new government. As Losurdo (2008a) points out, it was one of the most significant achievements of the Bolsheviks to build anew the structures of governance, economy, and society so as to arrive—after much arduous struggle—at what became the Soviet Union.[11]

The eventual outcome lay in the future, beyond Lenin's lifetime, although in the rapidly changing situation after the October Revolution many of the features of socialist governance began to appear. There were three significant processes of transition: from the spontaneity of the soviets

and other interim bodies to their institutionalisation; from a united front with other socialist parties to the leadership of the Communist Party as the single political party; from older hierarchical structures in the workplace to new forms of discipline and extensive worker democracy.

### 4.3.1 Institutionalisation of the Soviets

The first transition concerned the institutionalisation of the democratic practices of the soviets, so that they eventually became governmental bodies with ultimate decision-making power. The history of their origins and development of the soviets prior to the October Revolution may be mentioned briefly. The fabled Petrograd Soviet arose in the context of the initial revolutionary upsurge in 1905, with significant cultural and organisational input from Eastern Orthodox traditions of *symphonia* and *sobornost* (Prosic 2014; 2015).[12] The Soviet was reestablished during the February Revolution of 1917. With workers in their factories and soldiers in their garrisons electing deputies, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies wielded immense popular power. Over the next few months, not only did the number of soviets across Russia mushroom into the hundreds, but the sheer number of Bolshevik deputies also achieved a critical mass, so that by October the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" had real traction (Lenin 1917k; 1917a). However, the soviets in their spontaneous emergence and practice during the revolutionary period were always transitional forms.[13] As Lenin observed in early 1918, the soviet apparatus "is in many ways still disorderly and imperfect but is living and vital" (Lenin 1918b, 231; 1918e, 432). For any governmental consolidation to take place, they had to undergo development so as to be institutionalised. This is not to say that their core practices of democratic participation were somehow abandoned or stifled, but that the principle of democratic debate and decision-making would need to be practised in a more institutionalised form. This institutionalisation began quite early, for the soviets and their congresses had taken to issuing statements and decrees. By 6 January, 2018, we find that the more formal structures of the soviets were beginning to take shape. To quote from a decree of the Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs:

> The Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and Farm Labourers' Deputies are the local organs (of power) and are completely

> independent in local matters but always act in accordance with the decrees and decisions of the central soviet power and of the larger bodies … To soviets as well as to organs of power there fall the tasks of administration and service in every sphere of local life, administrative, economic, financial, cultural and educational (McCauley 1980, 183).

This process of institutionalisation would eventually lead to the establishment of the Supreme Soviet and the many lower-level soviets. Note also that this directive came from a commissariat, which indicates a process of institutionalisation relating to the Central Executive Committee (CEC). Already by the end of 2017, the CEC—now with more than 350 members—had moved from the temporary headquarters in the Smolny Institute and took over the premises of the ministries of old. The CEC had already established a series of commissariats to deal with economic, military, educational, and other portfolios. These commissariats settled into the offices, enticing and cajoling former employees to work for the new government.

### 4.3.2 Transition to Leadership of the Communist Party

The second transition concerned the realisation of Communist Party leadership. This was a complex process, initially moving rapidly in light of revolutionary realities, and then consolidating through the practice of democratic centralism. In the maelstrom of events after the October Revolution, we find the interim Constituent Assembly falling away by early 1918. Executive power shifted for a time to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets (CEC), with representatives from the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, along with the Soviet of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries played a significant role for a brief time, from December 2017 to March 2018, although not without frequent friction.[14] The once significant Socialist-Revolutionaries committed political suicide by engaging in their old practices of terror and assassination (with an attempt on Lenin's life), and found themselves no match for the Bolshevik response—especially through the Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution ("Cheka") from mid-March 2018. As other political parties wound down, such as the Mensheviks and the Bund, many of their members ended up joining the

Communist Party. By 1919, when the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War was underway, the gravity began to shift to the Central Committee of the renamed Communist Party (Bolshevik) and its Politburo, not least because of the dire situation of food and energy shortages and the realities of war. By the early 1920s, with the remarkable victory in the counter-revolutionary war, the process was by and large complete: the Communist Party was the undisputed leader in this new form of governance—an outcome no-one but themselves had anticipated or expected.

If one were to focus exclusively—as a few too many observers have done (Luxemburg 1918; Anweiler 1974; Rabinowitch 2007; Douds 2018)—on the increasing reality of Communist Party leadership, then it may seem as though these rapid developments went in a "dictatorial" or "authoritarian" direction. This is a very one-sided focus that distorts reality. We will see in a moment how democratic practices became the norm on the factory floor, but here I would like to emphasise both the significant increase in membership and how the Party experienced immense debates and struggles well into the 1930s. That membership should increase in light of the success of the October Revolution and after victory in the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War is obvious, although this increase brought with it a spate of new problems, from opportunism to anti-communists seeking to infiltrate Party ranks. The Eighth Party Congress in December of 1919 found itself needing to stipulate rules for admitting new members, along with the necessary disciplinary committee (CPSU (B) 1919, 201–209; McCauley 1980, 200–203; Lenin 1919k, 361–361; 1919d, 187–187). These rules would become a staple for subsequent resolutions. As for widespread debate, already in this early period we find moderates like Kamenev and Zinoviev favouring coalition government, radicals like Bukharin who wanted to carry revolution into the capitalist heartland, and the realists like Lenin and Stalin who saw the need to consolidate power first. We also find the development of various groups and factions, such as the syndicalist—not communist—Workers' Opposition, the Democratic Centralists, and the New Opposition, who were present within the Party and engaged in extensive debate over all manner of policies. Lenin's—and later Stalin's—failed efforts to ban "factionalism" attest to the reality of robust debate and indeed struggle within the Party.

### 4.3.3 Transitions in Worker Democracy

The third transition concerns the manifestations of worker democracy in many contexts, from the factory floor, through neighbourhoods and farming villages, to the armed forces. Here I draw on the recent work of Yiannis Kokosalakis (2022a),[15] who focuses—via archival research—on the Communist Party's grassroots. These were ordinary people, activists involved in Primary Party Organisations (PPO), and provided the necessary bond between the central Party organs and everyday lives. The significant material for present purposes comes immediately after the most intense struggles of the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War in 1921. Spurred by the Workers' Opposition to give serious attention to the Party's connections with the working class, a purge and then a census of membership began in the summer of 1921. Seeking to clean out opportunists—"also-communists"—who had joined the Party after victory and those who had become "commissarified," the outcome was a reduction from 710,000 to 410,000 Party members. Most significantly, the number of workers actually involved in production, and not those who had taken up professional Party or managerial positions, was at best 15 percent in Leningrad and Moscow. Waves of membership drives followed in the three years to 1925, with the result that membership more than doubled and—most significantly—92 percent of the new and suitably vetted members were workers. From a few hundred PPOs in 1922, there were now thousands across country with large numbers of members. These new members may have renewed the Party, but they also presented a range of new problems—as manifested in the struggles in the Kirov Plant in Leningrad in the mid-1920s (Kokosalakis 2022a, 48–91)—that required education in Marxism-Leninism and experience in Party work so as to became the foundation for widespread democratic practices.

How did this practice of worker democracy develop? While the PPOs had the absolutely crucial front-line tasks of promoting wave after wave of policies in a way that communicated directly with everyday life, they were also vocal critics of the very same policies. In this way, they provided not merely feedback to policy makers, but engaged actively in developing policies that were at least more pragmatic and geared to people's needs. Kokosalakis draws on records of the incessant conferences, meetings, and discussion groups to provide an account of the grassroots democracy that developed at the same time as Communist Party leadership was consolidated. This dual process in search of a dialectic was not necessarily

smooth. The constant process of raising concerns, suggested improvements, and criticism often rankled and at times threatened the decision makers in the central Party organs, while at the same time hobbling the speedy and efficient implementation of policies. In these early years, we can say that they were still on a steep learning curve. The formerly voiceless workers and peasants at last had a voice and they certainly used it, but they were learning how it could be constructive rather than limiting and destructive. For the Party's leadership, they too had to learn fast: in the context of repeated emphases on labour discipline so as to overcome absenteeism, stoppages, and pilfering, and in the search for efficient implementation of the correct policies in the correct way, they also had to learn that the criticisms from worker activists provided invaluable points for improvement.

At this point we must pause, since subsequent developments—from the profound tensions of the NEP of the 1920s through to the dual process of industrialisation and rural collectivisation of the 1930s—fall under the purview of the next chapter on Stalin. The processes I have outline here, in terms of the institutionalisation of the soviets, the consolidation of Communist Party leadership, and the growth of worker democracy, would come to a reasonable fulfilment by the late 1930s. But the material discussed in this section is sufficient to make a theoretical point: what we see is the initial development of democratic centralism in practice (see more below). It was not a case or either centralism or democracy, driven by the either-or framework of Western cultural and philosophical assumptions, but of both-and: centralism entails a drive to greater democracy, and a fully functioning democracy undergirds centralism. This principle arose in the practices mentioned above, well before it became a theory of socialist governance.

Finally, what has happened to *Gewalt*, the violent force of socialist power that Engels had emphasised in terms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that Lenin had taken even further as the need to smash and destroy the former ruling class and counter-revolutionary forces? The most immediate manifestation was in the continuance of revolutionary violence as the Bolsheviks consolidated power, and—of course—in the establishment of the Cheka. However, the proletarian dictatorship managed to achieve its initial aim in an unexpected way: through the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War.[16] By the early 1920s, the new Red Army had

managed to crush an array of “white” forces at all points of the compass, which were supported by international forces within and without the country. Counter-revolution had been halted and dispensed, and the success of the proletarian revolution was now guaranteed.[17] However, when the communists and indeed the common people surveyed the social landscape after the struggle, they found that former landlords and bourgeoisie had also been effectively smashed, with the remnants either fleeing abroad or absorbed into the new system.

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## 4.4 After October: Power, Democracy, and Democratic Centralism

In 1919, Lenin observed that until the October Revolution, “a state more democratic, in the true sense of the word, one more closely connected with the working and exploited people, has *never yet existed*” (Lenin 1919j, 29; 1919a, 433). By now it should be obvious that this statement by Lenin is neither political rhetoric nor delusional, but that it actually has substance, that it is factually correct. More specifically, we can already see in the first years of socialism in power a dual process, towards the consolidation of Communist Party leadership and the bumpy road to substantial and participatory democracy. As I have suggested, the two are not unrelated and not paradoxical. This final section, then, focuses on Lenin’s reflections in light of practice, noting the continuities and differences with his pre-October thought.

### 4.4.1 The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power

Already in the 1870s, Friedrich Engels had summarised a key task of socialist governance as the administration of the stuff of life and the conduct of production processes for the true interests of society (1873a, 86; 1873b, 425; 1894b, 535; 1894a, 268). I have begun with this point—discussed in Chapter 2—since it provides the basic principle that Lenin sought to address in what is arguably his most important post-October reflection on the actual practice of socialism in power: “The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power” (Lenin 1918c; 1918h).[18] Here, Lenin emphasises a fundamental shift: “We have won Russia from the rich for the poor, from the exploiters for the working people. Now we must *administer* Russia.”

This is the key: “the whole peculiarity of the present situation, the whole difficulty, lies in understanding *the specific features of the transition* from the principal task of convincing the people and of suppressing the exploiters by armed force to the principal task of *administration*” (Lenin 1918c, 172–173; 1918h, 242).[19] The word used here is *upravleniia*, with the senses of administration, management, control, and thus governing. Conquest and the seizure of power was largely destructive of the old order, but administration and thus governing is concerned with positive or constructive tasks. But what, exactly, does administration and thus governing entail?

First, it requires the “task of organising *administration*” as “the *main*, the *central* task” *(*Lenin 1918c, 172; 1918h, 242).[20] This is by no means “simple,” as Engels had suggested, but rather an “extremely intricate and delicate system” of relations so as to ensure the production and distribution of goods for the sake of tens of millions of people (Lenin 1918c, 171; 1918h, 241). Most immediately, the crisis produced by war, famine, social breakdown, and impending counter-revolutionary struggle meant that the organisational task involved ensuring the basics of life, elementary public security, and even economic growth. Lenin also has the longer term transition to socialism in mind. He emphasises that it is both the “most difficult” and the “most gratifying” task, since it involves the most comprehensive and most deep-rooted reorganising of the economic and social life of millions of people, so as to enable the transition to socialism.

Again and again, Lenin stresses the need for the strictest organisation, accounting, and administration, speaking in some detail of banks, state enterprises, taxes, compulsory labour service, and so on. These initially seem like rather mundane and trivial bureaucratic stipulations for the lofty goal of socialist construction and the eventual achievement of communism. But they are absolutely necessary. To emphasise how necessary, let me draw on an unlikely source: Max Weber’s emphasis on bureaucracy as rational, efficient, and superior. True, Lenin and later Stalin would regularly inveigh against bureaucratism, which was a shorthand for negligence and corruption in the sense that “state officials, being secure in their position, would become detached from broader mass of the working class and stop serving its interests” (Kokosalakis 2021b, 13).[21] But Lenin has in mind a different and more positive form of organisation and indeed bureaucracy. As Weber (1922, 129) observes, a “socialistic order [*Ordnung*]” would require “the creation of a strict bureaucratic administration with a higher

degree of substantial formal rules than a capitalist order." A socialist system would require a significantly higher level of organisation and complexity than any type of rational and efficient organisation seen thus far. It was this that the Bolsheviks sought.

Second, to achieve this organisational task, Lenin distinguishes between the leadership of the Communist Party, constituted by class-conscious workers, and the masses of workers and peasants. True, all workers would eventually be included—in substantive and participatory ways—within the new project, but for now they would have to be led and trained by a group of class-conscious workers. This emphasis on Communist Party leadership already appears in the "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" which Lenin wrote on the eve of the October Revolution and which was published soon afterwards. "We are not utopians," he writes, since we "know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration." However, the Bolsheviks are thoroughly opposed to the idea that only the rich, or officials chosen from rich families, are capable of *administering* the state, of performing the ordinary, everyday work of administration." But how are workers unused to such administration to learn? Training is the key. "*Revolutionary* democracy" means that ten or even twenty million common people could be brought into the administration so as to ensure the supply of housing, food, clothing, and so on. But they would need to be trained by "class-conscious workers," who can "imbue the oppressed and the working people with confidence in their own strength, to prove to them in practice that they can and must themselves ensure the *proper*, most strictly regulated and organised distribution of bread, all kinds of food, milk, clothing, housing, etc., *in the interests of the poor*" (Lenin 1917j, 315–317; 1917b, 113–115).[22] As Kokosalakis (2021b, 8) observes, "as it was not possible for every worker to directly participate in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, it became necessary for those who could to provide leadership to those who could not." In "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power," Lenin takes this point a step further. "Soviet power," he writes, is nothing but "an organisational form of the dictatorship of the proletariat." But what does this phrase mean? Lenin is clear: it is "the dictatorship of the advanced class," or, in other words, "the disciplined and class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat" (see also Lenin 1918a, 154; 1918g, 72). The task of this advanced or vanguard class is to raise tens of millions of working and formerly

exploited people to a new level of consciousness—through widespread educational and cultural work—so as to participate actively and substantively in governmental administration.

This emphasis on strict regulation and organisation brings us to the third point, which is captured in the phrase "iron authority" as the defining feature of the dictatorship of the proletariat in its early stages. Lenin is absolutely clear: any transition from capitalism to socialism requires "coercion precisely in the form of dictatorship" (Lenin 1918c, 194; 1918h, 263). This "iron hand [*zheleznaia ruka*]" has two tasks: the first is the "ruthless repression" of the resistance of former exploiters; the second is the suppression of mugging, crime, and "hooliganism [*khuliganstva*]" (Lenin 1918c, 195–196; 1918h, 264–265). What is meant by "hooliganism" here? On the one hand, these are overt manifestations of the death of the old order, which the revolutionary process brings to the surface. In this respect, sabotage, hoarding, and speculation are the death throws of the former landlord and bourgeois ruling class. On the other hand, there are among the workers "many waverers and 'weak' characters who are unable to withstand the 'temptation' of profiteering, bribery, personal gain obtained by spoiling the whole apparatus" (Lenin 1918c, 198; 1918h, 267). As Kokosalakis (2021b) emphasises, Lenin has introduced a crucial distinction that is already implicit in the notion of leadership by the Communist Party. This leadership also includes leadership, training, and stern discipline over distinct elements among workers themselves. This is particularly needed in the early days of socialism in power, since workers may still be overly influenced by former assumptions, may be misled by those who seek to overthrow Soviet power, or simply resort to desperate measures in desperate times. These strict measures are required for even a modicum of public order, and they are closely connected with the need for labour discipline so as to get a ruined economy moving again.

Fourth, this vanguard role of class-conscious workers—as the dictatorship of the proletariat—goes hand in hand with radical proletarian democracy. For those accustomed to either-or oppositions, this may seem like an unsolvable contradiction. But it is not so. Instead, the dictatorship of proletariat is both the means for achieving a new form of democracy and the embodiment of this democracy. In the next section, I will have more to say on this topic, save to note here that Lenin emphasises both the path of democracy, from the first steps of Soviets in which the exploited had begun

to find their voice to a fully-fledged socialist democracy, and the dialectical connection with the iron rule of the proletarian dictatorship. This dialectic comes to its sharpest expression when he speaks of the director of an industrial plant or railway and the roles of workers. On the one hand, absolute discipline is needed and the word of the director—a communist director—must have dictatorial authority if the plant or the railway is to function; on the other hand, workers must engage in the most extensive types of democratic participation, both for the sake of supervision of the director and for substantive participation in the enterprise. On two occasions does he emphasise this point:

> We must learn to combine the "public meeting" democracy of the working people—turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood—with *iron* discipline while at work, with *unquestioning obedienc*e to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work (Lenin 1918c, 203; 1918h, 271).[23]
>
> The more resolutely we now have to stand for a ruthlessly firm government, for the dictatorship of individuals in *definite processes of work*, in definite aspects of *purely executive* functions, the more varied must be the forms and methods of control from below in order to counteract every shadow of a possibility of distorting the principles of Soviet government (Lenin 1918c, 206; 1918h, 275).[24]

It would be easy—but superficial—to misrepresent these texts as a justification for individual dictatorship per se. But note the emphases: this refers to a Soviet leader and it applies to specific processes at work, to strictly executive functions. At the very same time the most robust worker democracy must take place. For Lenin, this "higher type" of democracy is nothing less than "proletarian democracy," but it is also a concrete manifestation of democratic centralism.

To sum up: in this significant work on Soviet power, Lenin emphasises the core role of organisation and administration. But—and going beyond Engels and Marx—it is far more complex than anyone might have imagined: it requires the leadership of the Communist Party even over recalcitrant elements among workers; the iron authority of the dictatorship of the proletariat; and at the very same time the growth of mass participation as proletarian democracy.

### 4.4.2 Socialist Democracy

The time is overdue for a consideration of how Lenin understood socialist democracy after October. In the first part, I outlined two senses of democracy in Lenin's texts, the first concerning bourgeois democracy and the second a united-front type of democracy that took "democracy" in its widespread usage at the time as meaning "socialism" and thus applicable to all socialist parties. I did flag a third sense, socialist democracy, and we have seen in the previous section that Lenin espoused this as a substantive and participatory form of democracy for the broad masses of workers that was coterminous with, and even constitutive of, the proletarian dictatorship. So let us see how he defines this sense in a little more detail. For Lenin, "democracy" is in its essence a socialist project: it is a full, complete, and consistent democratisation that would lead to its own demise. How does this definition relate to the united-front type of democracy? As mentioned earlier, we may distinguish between minimal and maximal senses: the minimal meaning designates all socialist parties and their struggle against the old aristocracy and especially the bourgeoisie with its form of bourgeois democracy; the maximal meaning speaks of proletarian or socialist democracy as advocated by communists.

This maximal sense is not provided by Lenin in a detailed exposition, since he developed the meaning in response to developments on the ground and in the context of often sharp debates.[25] We may draw out the following points from moments in his writings. To begin with, socialist democracy is predicated on radical change in the entire political system, which means that it is quantitatively and qualitatively distinct (Cai 2011, 144). Quantitatively, socialist democracy is the rule by and expresses the will of the rural and urban workers, who comprise the vast majority that had been exploited by and excluded from the benefits of capitalist democracy (Lenin 1919f, 90–91; 1919c, 106–107). Thus, socialist democracy is partisan and openly so, for the sake of the majority. As Lenin observed: "'Liberties' and democracy *not* for all, but *for* the working and exploited masses, to emancipate them from exploitation; ruthless suppression of exploiters" (Lenin 1918h, 73; 1918g, 155).[26]

In qualitative terms, Lenin came to speak of Soviet or proletarian democracy as not merely a higher, but the "highest form of democracy" in which the working class and other workers are the masters of the country (Lenin 1919i, 304; 1919 h, 308; 1919f, 89–96; 1919c, 105–112). But what

makes it qualitatively distinct? The dictatorship of the proletariat. Two preliminary points need to be noted. First, Lenin had duly noted and indeed emphasised Engels's identification of the Paris commune with the proletarian dictatorship, although he took this insight to its logical and historical conclusion in terms of socialist democracy and proletarian dictatorship. Second, I noted earlier, in the treatment of "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power," that Lenin saw the iron discipline of the proletarian dictatorship as coterminous with, and indeed inescapably connected in practice, the full expression of proletarian democracy in the workplace. However, that text does not yet make the theoretical and dialectical point that the proletarian dictatorship is by definition socialist democracy and thus the highest form of democracy. This would come soon, in "'Democracy' and Dictatorship," where he writes: "The dictatorship of the proletariat alone can emancipate humanity from the oppression of capital, from the lies, falsehood and hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy—democracy *for the rich*—and establish democracy *for the poor*, that is, make the blessings of democracy *really* accessible to the workers and poor peasants" (Lenin 1919e, 390; 1919b, 370).[27] Again, this is clearly a partisan definition of democracy, in the sense that the proletarian dictatorship would ruthlessly suppress the former ruling class and any counter-revolutionary outbursts, but that in doing so it would ensure mass participation by those formerly excluded from any substantive participation in democracy. Indeed, we may see the seeds here of Mao Zedong's later democratic dictatorship, with the sense that dictatorship is exercised against the internal and external enemies of a socialist country, and that democracy is the reality for the many rural and urban workers within the country.

### 4.4.3 Democratic Centralism

We may go a step further, specifically with the crucial theoretical development of democratic centralism. I have mentioned on a couple of occasions that democratic centralism was implicit in certain practices, but here I address the theory itself. The principle itself emerged in debates over party structures in 1904–1905, and would come to have profound ramifications for the global communist movement (Li W. 2010; Ma 2014, 208–209; Li Z. and Wang 2018). To be clear, it was initially seen as a concept to be deployed for inner-Party practice, in terms of full freedom to criticise so as to maintain unity of action: "The principle of democratic

centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full *freedom to criticise*, so long as this does not disturb the unity *of a definite action*; it rules out *all* criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the *unity* of an action decided on by the Party" (Lenin 1906e, 129; 1906c, 443; see also 1906f, 237; 1906a, 163; Harding 1981, vol. 2, 172–79).[28] More fully and in the context of inner-party struggles, Lenin observes:

> We are all agreed on the principle of democratic centralism, on guarantees for the rights of all minorities and for all loyal opposition, on the autonomy of every Party organisation, on recognising that all Party functionaries must be elected, accountable to the Party and subject to recall. We see the observance in practice of these principles of organisation, their sincere and consistent application, as a guarantee against splits, a guarantee that the ideological struggle in the Party can and must prove fully consistent with strict organisational unity (Lenin 1906d, 399–400; 1906b, 314).

However, the major step was to apply democratic centralism to the new form of governance as a whole, initially in terms of nationalities and autonomous regions, and then in relation to economic developments and the governmental structure (Lenin 1917d, 74; 1917i, 453; see also 1913b, 143–149; 1913a, 45–51; 1918f, 151–153; 1918d, 207–209). Lenin went so far as to stipulate democratic centralism internationally, in terms of the relationship between the Comintern and communist parties around the world. Herein lie two problems. The first pertains to governance within a particular country. It was simply assumed that democratic centralism could be extended from its principal deployment in inner-Party governance to governing the country as a whole. The question as to whether such a move would require institutional transformations to make it work for country-wide governance was never really addressed. We will in subsequent chapters see that it took decades of practice and reflection in China before a solution was found.

The second problem is international, concerning the stipulation in the rules for admission to the Comintern. To quote:

> Parties belonging to the Communist International must be organised on the principle of democratic *centralism*. In this period of acute

> civil war, the Communist parties can perform their duty only if they are organised in a most centralised manner, are marked by an iron discipline bordering on military discipline, and have strong and authoritative party centres invested with wide powers and enjoying the unanimous confidence of the membership (Lenin 1920d, 209; 1920c, 210).[29]

Apart from the weight falling on centralism, this article explicitly addresses the structure of parties in various countries. However, it implicitly assumes that the Comintern itself would be structured in a similar way, leading to the well-known reproach of "orders from Moscow." To be sure, the wide-ranging assistance given by the Soviet Union to struggles in other countries made a massive difference and contributed in many cases to their successes. But in some cases it became a hindrance, particularly as manifested in the Communist Party of China. The struggle came to a head in the famous Zunyi Conference, in January 1935 during the early stage of the Long March. The leadership appointed by the Comintern was replaced —due to failures in military tactics in the final stages of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet—with Mao Zedong and his circle. This was the practical experience that led not long afterwards to an emphasis on China's "own laws of development," "its own national characteristics," and the need for "concrete Marxism [*juti de makesizhuyi*]" that is "applied to the concrete struggle in the concrete conditions [*juti huanjing*] prevailing in China" (Mao 1938a, 658–659; 1938b, 538–539).[30]

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## 4.5 Conclusion: An Unexpected Withering

To sum up: I have sought to analyse Lenin's contributions in terms of the October Revolution. Before October, Lenin's thoughts on the state and socialist democracy remained in the realm of theory, no matter how much he and other Bolsheviks may have studied the texts of Marx and Engels in light of Russian conditions. During the threshold period of the October Revolution and its immediate aftermath, characterised by the grim realities of counter-revolutionary struggle, war, and social and economic breakdown, I emphasised the rapid shifts in terms of institutionalisation (especially of the soviets), in the increasing reality of Communist Party leadership, and the practices of socialist democracy. The theory that arose from these

experiences is marked by continuity and discontinuity. In seeking to explicate what the administration of the stuff of life for the true interests of society (so Engels and Marx) meant in practice, Lenin came to emphasise the crucial category of proletarian dictatorship, in terms of leading and training workers themselves in light of the new realities, and in the iron discipline needed for the sake of survival and indeed economic rebuilding. At the same time, it was connected more closely with socialist democracy, which Lenin saw as a long-term process and as a qualitatively superior form of democracy to any that had gone before. The theoretical expression of this dialectical connection between proletarian dictatorship and socialist democracy was less in terms of their equation, but more in terms of the new but undeveloped category of democratic centralism.

By way of conclusion, I would like to address three questions. The first concerns the singular role of the Communist Party and the exclusion of all other parties. In many respects, this was an understandable development in light of historical conditions. We can forget about the bourgeois and conservative parties, but it was the Socialist-Revolutionaries who both committed political suicide and were eventually banned despite a brief period of coalition government. At the same time, it was a curious and perhaps unfortunate development, especially when we consider the Chinese situation. Here, the democratic and thus socialist parties, which were part of the revolutionary struggle and participated in the period of New Democracy and coalition government, have come to be part of the multi-party consultative democracy practised in China today.

Second, already before the October Revolution Lenin had begun to speak of the "proletarian state," and in works such as "The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power" he is explicit. He speaks openly of the "highest type of state [*gosudarstva*]—Soviet power [*vlast'*]" and of the "socialist state [*Sotsialisticheskoe gosudarstvo*] (Lenin 1918c, 175, 185; 1918h, 245, 255).[31] The two terms used here—*gosudarstvo* and *vlast'*—overlap somewhat, but we may see the core term *vlast'* as an effort to translate *Gewalt.* Of course, with translations the semantic fields overlap only partially. While *Gewalt* connotes power, force, and violence, *vlast'* means power, authority, rule, and thus lends itself more towards the concept of the state. This connection with the state is the key, since it is a distinct step beyond Engels, who hesitated to speak of the state in a socialist system in light of his definition of the state as a separated public power.

Further, Lenin makes a crucial point:

> The state, which for centuries has been an organ for oppression and robbery of the people, has left us a legacy of the people's supreme hatred and suspicion of everything that is connected with the state. It is very difficult to overcome this, and only Soviet power can do it, but it will require plenty of time and enormous perseverance to accomplish it (Lenin 1918c, 184; 1918h, 253).

As Domenico Losurdo has emphasised repeatedly (2008b; 2008a; 2016), a signature feature of countries that experienced anti-colonial struggles for national liberation is the positive and beneficial role of the state. For countries that have for a long time indeed been denied state sovereignty, the state is absolutely crucial for socialist construction, the development of socialist democracy and so on. The text quoted from Lenin indicates a qualification of Losurdo's point. In countries such as Russia, which had experienced centuries of autocratic and oppressive rule, it would require a massive re-education for its citizens to see the state in a positive and beneficial light. It was to this task that he committed Soviet power, and it is for this reason that he began to speak of a qualitatively new proletarian and Soviet state.

Finally, this emphasis raises the question as to what has happened to the fabled "dying away" of the state? Earlier, I mentioned that Lenin came to speak of a "very, very long time" before national differences would begin to disappear. And in the early years of Soviet power Lenin emphasised the heightened role of the dictatorship of the proletariat, led by the Communist Party and exercising an iron authority that acted ruthlessly against exploiters as well as hooligans and sought to lead the masses along the path of socialist construction. On a superficial reading, this would seem to be a strengthening of Communist-led state power, with the "withering" put off into an indefinite future. A more substantial reading of the actual practices of worker democracy through grassroots worker organisations (PPOs), with the concomitant development of strong Communist Party leadership, indicates that the withering away of the state took an unexpected path. Simply put, it entailed the breakdown of the distinction between state and society. This development has perplexed Western scholars accustomed to what they see as a universal distinction, with some advocating "bottom-up"

initiatives from society and other “bottom-down” approaches via the state. But as the socialist system developed in the Soviet Union, it became clear to scholars already some years ago that governance was already shading “almost imperceptibly into a dynamic, mobile, dramatically changing society” (Getty 1987, 394). More recently, this process had been attributed to the multi-layered or focus-field nature of the Communist Party itself, the activity of which “blurred the boundaries between” state and society (Kokosalakis 2021a, 355). In other words, it was precisely through the myriad Party organisations, from the central leadership to local levels, that the organs of governance began to stand—as Engels put it—in the midst of society. We may go further: the dying away of the state is not simply to be relegated to some unspecified future development, but is itself a long process that begins imperceptibly from the first moments of socialism in power. Given these unexpected developments, there was no explicit or extensive thinking through of what was happening, in light of the speed of events and the fixation on standard perceptions of the state’s dying away. We may, however, espy the first glimmers in some of Lenin’s “Ten Theses on Soviet Power,” to which I give the last word:

> (3) abolition of parliamentarism (as the separation of legislative from executive activity); union of legislative and executive state activity. Fusion of administration with legislation;
>
> (4) closer connection of the whole apparatus of state power and state administration with the masses than under previous forms of democracy;
>
> (9) transfer of the focus of attention in questions of democracy from formal recognition of a formal equality of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, of poor and rich, to the practical feasibility of the enjoyment of freedom (democracy) by the working and exploited mass of the population (Lenin 1918h, 72–73; 1918g, 154–155).

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# Footnotes

1 This is also the emphasis of Yiannis Kokosalakis (2022b, 217). The most comprehensive account of Lenin's political thought in English remains the two volume work by Neil Harding (1981), although it is vitiated by an anti-communist betrayal narrative (Harding 1984).

2 The terminology is from Chinese Marxist scholarship. The two inevitabilities come from the "Communist Manifesto": "The fall [of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (Marx and Engels 1848a, 474; 1848b, 496). The two impossibilities come from Marx's preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*: "No social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society" (Marx 1859b, 101; 1859a, 263).

3 Emphasis in original.

4 Here Lenin quotes Engels's observation that the bourgeoisie "exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely" (Engels 1892a, 265; 1892b, 271).

5 To move ahead to the post-October context: at the height of the struggle to establish Soviet power against immense odds, Lenin observed: "We have always known, said and emphasised that socialism

… takes shape in the course of the most intense, the most acute class struggle—which reaches heights of frenzy and desperation and civil war; we have always said that a long period of 'birth-pangs' lies between capitalism and socialism; that violence is always the midwife of the old society; that a special state (that is, a special system of organised coercion of a definite class) corresponds to the transitional period between the bourgeois and the socialist society, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat. What dictatorship implies and means is a state of simmering war, a state of military measures of struggle against the enemies of the proletarian power (Lenin 1917l, 192; 1917c, 401).

6 During massive strikes and protests in Odessa, the crew of the Potemkin decided to join the revolutionary side on 27 June 1905. Despite plans for a navy uprising, the Social-Democratic organisers within the navy were caught unprepared and could not assist. The ship sailed about aimlessly, and after eleven days it docked in Romania, where the vast majority of the crew chose to remain while the ship itself was returned to Russia by the Romanian authorities. From his initial response in the middle of 1905 onwards (Lenin 1905g; 1905m), Lenin would refer to the Potemkin mutiny on many occasions as a watershed moment.

7 Engels drew on his military training and direct experience in revolutionary fighting in 1848 to write a large number of deeply insightful articles on military conflicts from the 1850s to the 1870s, along with analyses of the history and present realities of all aspects of military forces, such as training, equipment, discipline, morale, fortifications, tactics, and the first real argument for the need for a good and decisive military force for any revolutionary movement. This material may be found in *MEGA* I.11, *MEW* 11 and *MECW* 11 onwards (from the 1848 revolutions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871), as well as analyses of military forces in *MEGA* I.16–I.18, *MEW* 14–15 and *MECW* 18–19.

8 Emphasis in original.

9 The material in this section is drawn from *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners* (Boer 2021, 237–239).

10 In the pressure of revolutionary developments, when years were compressed into weeks and even days, Lenin deployed a number of terms that he would later leave aside. These include: the shorthand of "democratic revolution" to refer to the range of socialist parties pushing for revolution (Lenin 1906f; 1906a); and "revolutionary-democratic" parties and even a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry," which was seen to be distinct from the "socialist dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" (Lenin 1905h; 1905n; 1905d, 126–141; 1905o, 382–395).

11 The most readily available resource on such matters for the history of the USSR is *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress Resolutions and Decisions, and Conferences and Plenums of the Central Committee (1898–1986)*, published by Izdatel′stvo politicheskoi literatury, Moscow, from the 1950s until 1990.

12 As Prosic (2015, 215) notes, “Etymologically, the noun *sobornost* comes from the verb *(so-)brat* which means ‘to gather together’, ‘to unite’, ‘to assemble together’, ‘to come together’. Other derivatives include the noun *sobor* which means ‘gathering’, ‘assembly’, ‘church building’, ‘harmony’, ‘concord’, and in a significant semantic overlap with the famous soviets it can also mean a ‘council’.”.

13 Prosic (2014, 186) defines the soviets as organisations across professional and class lines, as “multiple, diverse entities around the same goal,” with a “concern for the working class and their aspiration towards a harmonious society based on equality, thereby uniting them in an organic, interdependent whole 186.”

14 For a detailed presentation of the role of Sovnarkom in these early years, see Douds (2018, 21–82).

15 The references to this work are drawn from a pre-publication manuscript kindly provided by the author.

16 As Kokosalakis (2022a, 20) observes, “Combined with the principles of mass participation and party leadership, Lenin’s notion of revolutionary proletarian dictatorship proved to be a winning strategy for the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War.”.

17 In many respects, the revolutionary struggle itself was not complete until the foreign-sponsored counter-revolution had been defeated. It may be argued that seizure of power in the October Revolution was the high point of this longer revolutionary struggle, and that the success of the revolution was achieved only with the crushing of counter-revolutionary forces. For a useful account of this epoch-changing struggle, see Smele (2015).

18 I am grateful to Yiannis Kokosalakis for drawing attention to this text, and in what follows I am indebted to a lecture delivered in March 2021 at the School of Marxism at Dalian University of Technology.

19 Emphasis in original.

20 Emphasis in original.

21 This quotation is drawn from the text of lecture delivered by the author at Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China, in March of 2021. Many thanks to the author for providing this text.

22 Emphasis in original.

23 Emphasis in original.

24 Emphasis in original.

25 That said, we do find occasional fuller and programmatic statements, such as the one found in the draft program of the Russian Communist Party from early 1919 (Lenin 1919f, 89–96; 1919c, 105–112). Even here, we find a distinct emphasis—as we saw earlier—on "first steps," on the need to take time in transforming the whole system so as to arrive at socialist democracy.

26 Emphasis in original.

27 Emphasis in original.

28 Emphasis in original.

29 Emphasis in original.

30 In fact, the insistence on democratic centralism in the Comintern was in some contradiction with article 8: "Parties in countries whose bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations must pursue a most well-defined and clear-cut policy in respect of colonies and oppressed nations. Any party wishing to join the Third International must ruthlessly expose the colonial machinations of the

imperialists of its “own” country, must support—in deed, not merely in word—every colonial liberation movement, demand the expulsion of its compatriot imperialists from the colonies, inculcate in the hearts of the workers of its own country an attitude of true brotherhood with the working population of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and conduct systematic agitation among the armed forces against all oppression of the colonial peoples” (Lenin 1920d, 208; 1920c, 209).

31 The mention of a “socialist state” became quite frequent after the October Revolution. While the capitalist state had to be smashed, Communists are by no means anarchists. Instead, they are “committed to establishing a state … a new socialist state” (Lenin 1917f, 113; 1917 g, 341–342).

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# 5. The Soviet Union as a Multi-national and Anti-colonial State

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## 5.1 Opening Remarks

An inescapable structural feature of socialist governance in the USSR concerns "the national question." We need to be careful here, since the term "nation" or "nationality"—*natsiia natsional'nost'* in Russian—designate not what has come to be called in a Western context a "nation-state," but a particular group with common characteristics within a state. At times, one will find the term "ethnic group" or "ethnicity" used in English, but this is misleading since a nationality is not determined by its ethnic identity. For this reason, I will use the term "nationality," which is the common term in all the material from the debates at the turn of the twentieth century to the realities in China today. In terms of this chapter, we will find that although Lenin spoke of nationalities and Bolshevik policy, it would fall to Stalin to provide the full understanding of nationalities' policy and indeed the crucial insight that there was a theoretical and practical connection with anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. In order to understand how this feature of socialist governance developed, this chapter begins with debates at the turn of the twentieth century in central and eastern Europe.

In a little more detail, the chapter begins by presenting the key positions in the debate over the national question by drawing on material concerning the Austrian Marxists, especially Otto Bauer, the General Jewish Workers'

Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (the Bund), and Caucasian Mensheviks. Against their general preference for “cultural-national autonomy,” Stalin’s key essay from 1913—“Marxism and the National Question”—not only provided a deeply influential definition of a nationality, but also proposed that the working class should be the determining feature for structures of socialist governance. Here is a crucial dialectical point: it was precisely the unifying and indeed totalising category of class that provided a firm foundation for a much more comprehensive approach to the diversity of nationalities within what would become a multi-national socialist state. The next section provides an overview of how this worked out in practice, presenting material concerning the world’s first preferential policies for minority nationalities. This section also shows how the very structures of socialist governance incorporated nationalities rather than excluding them (as in capitalist states). Further, the experience concerning minority nationalities led to an insight that would change the structures of the world in the twentieth century: the liberation of nationalities within the Soviet Union was a microcosm for the many anti-colonial struggles for national liberation throughout the world. Not only was this insight determinative for the Soviet Union’s support for the many anti-colonial struggles in the “rear” of capitalist imperialism, but it was also a rediscovery through concrete practice of the initial point from Marx and Engels that anti-colonial struggles are a species of class struggle. The chapter closes by addressing a distinct problem in the Soviet Union’s approach: the right to secession of autonomous republics, which was—mistakenly—seen as an extension of the right to self-determination. This right to secession was not taken up by other socialist countries.

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## 5.2 Historical Background

At the turn of the twentieth century, the national question was a topic of considerable debate among a number of socialist organisations, especially between Austrian Marxists, Caucasian Mensheviks, the General Jewish Workers’ Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (known as the Bund), and the Bolsheviks. Their debate turned on how socialism in power would deal with the many nationalities within a state. Notably, the debate took place not in the smaller countries and city-states of western Europe, but especially

in Austria-Hungary and Russia—both with significant landmass and multiple nationalities. In this section, I deal with the most prominent of the Austrian Marxists, Otto Bauer, major representatives from the Bund, and the Caucasian socialists. The purpose here is to present an overview of the wider debates to which Lenin and especially Stalin responded.

### 5.2.1 Austrian Marxism

Let us begin with Otto Bauer (1881–1938), the leading theorist among the Austrian Marxists. For Bauer, "a nation is the totality of human beings bound together by a community of fate [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*] into a community of character [*Charaktergemeinschaft*]" (Bauer 1907, 118; 2000, 117).[1] By "community of character" Bauer attempts to indicate what distinguishes one nationality from another, and he tries to identify distinct differences in ways of thinking, behaviour, and assumptions (Bauer 1907, 120–126; 2000, 119–125). However, this character is neither a given nor a cause of the assumptions and behaviours of individuals within a nationality. Instead, we may understand a nationality's community of character by considering the community of "fate" or "destiny." This term means the long and complex historical process that produces a community of character. Bauer emphasises that such a community is always relative, to other communities and between individuals within them, and that it is subject to change in light of historical developments. Much of his investigation is devoted to identifying how a nationality's community of character has developed over time, how it changes, and how it entails a constant interaction with historical and contemporary forces. There is no such thing as an unchanging national spirit, since each generation inherits a distinct cultural framework which is modified in light of experience and events. Thus, the "character of a nationality" is not an explanation of distinct characteristics, but a reality that needs to be analysed in historical terms.

Intriguingly, in the preface to the second edition (1924) Bauer also argues that socialist movements are influenced and indeed determined by the cultural and national conditions in which they operate. He deploys a religious analogy to make his point: in the same way that Roman Catholicism, with its centralised leadership and uniform doctrines, acquires national specificity in the different nations, so also "in each nation inherited national characteristics are giving international socialist ideology a particular national form" (Bauer 2000, 18). Obviously, this is rather

prescient of later developments, such as socialism in one country or socialism with Chinese characteristics. To quote further:

> Just as in its historical praxis the working class in every country must increasingly adapt its methods of struggle to the particularities of the national terrain of struggle the closer it comes to power, so too does the socialist ideology of the working class establish an increasingly closer relationship with the particular cultural heritage of the nation the more it absorbs that culture … It is not the leveling of national particularities, but the promoting of international unity within national diversity that can and must be the task of the International (Bauer 2000, 18).

### 5.2.2 The Bund

A second major vector in the debate came from the Bund, which was engaged in constant debate and struggle over the national question.[2] We may distinguish between two main emphases. The first were the internationalists, such as Leon Goldman and Dovid Kats, who argued strenuously that the major concern should be the international working class and not "cultural-national" interests. They saw the latter as divisive, risking a diversion of working-class interests away from the primary struggle against capitalist exploitation. The second grouping—including John Mill, Yekutiel Portnoi and Vladimir Kossovskii (Nokhem Mendl Levinson)—argued just as strongly for Jewish identity as a nationality. For these nationalists, a nationality should be defined in terms of culture and language. Between these two sides were some other theorists, especially Vladimir Medem, who argued that "national character"—a term drawn from the Austrian Marxists—was a cultural content common to all human beings, but that it took distinct forms due to historical reasons and the conjunctions of social forces in a specific location. It followed, Medem argued, that citizenship of a "state of nationalities" should be neutral in terms of one's identification in terms of a nationality: all should be included, and a person's nationality should not be identified.

While Medem's proposals may have been an effort to overcome the divisiveness created by debates over the national question in the Bund, they did not resolve those struggles. Now one side, and now the other gained the ascendancy and influenced the Bund's program. For example, those in

favour of identifying the Bund as the representative of Jewish workers were able to get the Fourth Congress of 1901 and the Sixth Congress of 1905 to adopt ever clearer resolutions concerning the Jews as a “nationality,” the need for “cultural-national autonomy,” and for the future socialist state to be a “federation of nationalities” in which self-government was to be transferred to the “nationality” so as to enable “free cultural development” (Frankel 1981, 195, 220, 241, 247). However, the proponents of internationalism within the Bund were by no means on the back foot. While they worked hard to ensure that the statements of principle were bereft of a concrete program and could not be enacted, they also persuaded the majority to overcome the 1903 split with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and re-join that Party in 1906. The story continues with the Bund yet again breaking away, only to participate significantly in the October Revolution and then dissolve itself. Most of its members joined what was soon to become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) and not a few took up leadership positions.

### 5.2.3 Caucasian Mensheviks

The dominant Menshevik section of the Caucasian Social Democrats adopted an even more extreme “cultural-national autonomy” position, arguing for the determining influence of cultural factors over history and economics. The complex political and economic history of the Caucasus meant that class aspirations were usually expressed in cultural and national terms (Suny 1993, 38–43, 58–64, 72–76). Thus, the Georgians were mostly peasants with a nobility dreaming of the glories of the Georgian past while being integrated with the Russian tsarist state administration; the dispersed Armenians made up the bulk of the relatively new bourgeoisie and controlled commerce and the oil fields of Baku; and the Azerbaijani (and immigrant Persian) Muslims formed the lowly paid workers in the oil fields. These realities led to the Georgian nobles promoting a “feudal-monarchist” nationalism inescapably connected with their Eastern Orthodox faith, while the dispersed Armenians sought identity through their Armenian church and promoted a “bourgeois” non-territorial nationalism in competition with the fledgling Russian bourgeoisie and the larger European bourgeoisies. By contrast, the younger and radical Georgian intelligentsia (including Stalin) developed a mass political movement that brought together Georgian peasants and both Georgian and Azerbaijani workers.

Their opponents were the tsarist autocracy (and therefore Georgian nobles) and the largely Armenian bourgeoisie. One can see how easily the primary identification of a class would be expressed in cultural terms, especially in terms of language and religion. The Caucasian Social Democrats also struggled over this question, with the Mensheviks promoting a cultural-national autonomy position for a future socialist state, thereby obscuring the question of class.

### 5.2.4 Stalin's Definition of a Nationality

It should be no surprise that Stalin's direct experience with this complex situation would lead to a lifelong interest in such matters. Of course, he belonged to the minority Bolshevik section of the Caucasian Social Democrats, who resolutely promoted the priority and determining role of class in any analysis. More of that later, since here I would like to quote an immensely influential definition of a nation or nationality: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 1913a, 164; 1913b, 307). Notably, ethnicity is not part of the definition. Further, the positions of Austrian Marxists such as Otto Bauer, the nationalist wing of the Bund, and the Mensheviks in the Caucasus may all be seen as limited to the "psychological make-up," or the "specific spiritual complexion [*osobennosti dukhovnogo oblika*]" (Stalin 1913a, 163; 1913b, 306),[3] of a common culture and its historical formation.[4] Clearly, Stalin's definition is more comprehensive, and it was quickly acknowledged as forming the basis of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party's platform.[5] With these credentials, this approach—after much further development—would come to influence approaches to minority nationalities in all socialist countries up to the present day.[6]

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## 5.3 Class as the Unifying Basis for Diversity

There is particular argument in Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" that would come to have immense importance: in terms of nationalities, the resolute focus should be on the unifying category of class, which would lead in turn to the recognition and indeed fostering of greater diversity.

### 5.3.1 Lenin's Approach

In this section, I will pay close attention to this argument, but first let us note Lenin's contributions to the debate. In response to the tsarist policy of subordinating all of the linguistic and national variety of the Russian empire to an enforced "Great-Russian nationalism," Lenin tirelessly reiterated that "whoever does not recognise and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality is not a Marxist" (Lenin 1913c, 125; 1913b, 28). The specific issue may have varied—from language in schools to bills in the Duma—but the responses repeated the same point: national autonomy, self-determination, linguistic freedom, and no imposition by one nation on another. "All nations in the state are absolutely equal, and all privileges enjoyed by any one nation or any one language are held to be inadmissible and anti-constitutional" (Lenin 1914b, 136; 1914a, 281). Crucially, the reason for such a position is that class is the bond for all workers, and that nationalities—like religions—are secondary features pertaining to the superstructure. Workers of all languages, cultures, and nationalities need to work together in a united front, for class is always primary (Lenin 1903a; 1903b). Any insistence on the primacy of the identity of nationalities and the urging of a federation would split the working class into rival groups.[7]

### 5.3.2 Stalin: The Unifying Category of Class as the Basis for the Diversity of Nationalities

To return to Stalin: his contribution appeared in a crowded polemical space. All were seeking a Marxist solution to the same problem: how to incorporate and protect the many minority nationalities living in the same state.[8] Their disagreements turned on two issues. The first was the contrast between class and nationality: is class to be the basis of the national question, or is to be "national culture"? As we have seen, the Austrian Marxists, the Bund, and the Caucasians Mensheviks advocated the latter and developed a culturist federalism with a federated state that would account for multiple nationalities. Stalin begged to differ, stressing that the core category is class, and that from here one could deal more comprehensively with the question of nationalities. The second issue is related, for it concerns diversity and unity: if one begins with "cultural-national" diversity, then one struggles to find unity within a federated state;

but if one begins with class, then unity follows. Now we come to the key point: this emphasis on unity through class produces an innovative dialectical outcome. Unity through class does not result in assimilation under a uniform culture (as one finds in capitalist states), but in a higher level of diversity that fosters the distinct characteristics of nationalities. This principle would lead to the Soviet Union's unprecedented recognition of the territorial claims of nationalities and strong protections for minorities without territory.

This dialectical point comes to the fore in the section of Stalin's essay where he respond to the Bund.[9] While the Bund argued for national autonomy leading to federalism, Stalin argued for class unity leading to national diversity. In a little more detail: Stalin argued for a stark difference between the Bolshevik position and that of his opponents. The latter sought a primary recognition of cultural-national difference in both Party structures and a future socialist state. The starting point was multiplicity, which would lead to a federated state. For Stalin, the Bund began at the wrong point, with cultural-national autonomy rather than international class solidarity. A federalist approach "substitutes for the socialist principle of the class struggle the bourgeois 'principle of nationality'" (Stalin 1913a, 195; 1913b, 342). Typically, Stalin seeks to sharpen the opposition in terms of a clear either-or: the first principle is either the unity of class or the multiplicity of autonomy. One's starting point determines the path one takes: the Bund's approach leads to disunity and ultimately separatism, while the Bolshevik approach produces unity. The Bund may have sought unity through federalism, but since it began with multiplicity, its search for unity would always be superficial, masking a persistent multiplicity that would eventually lead to separatism. This was, argued Stalin, analogous to bourgeois movements—such as the approach of the Armenian bourgeoisie in the Caucasus—which sought national autonomy that was at times "skilfully masked by socialist phrases" (Stalin 1913a, 195; 1913b, 342).

The polemical sharpness of the opposition between the positions of the Bund and the Bolsheviks risks obscuring their common points. The nationalist wing of the Bund felt that its proposals for cultural-national autonomy would produce a unified federal state that was fully cognisant of the diversity of nationalities. Further, they feared that the Bolshevik approach proposed by Stalin and other Bolsheviks would lead to the oppression of nationalities and would thus be little different from the tsarist

autocracy. Stalin's response sought to bring out the weakness of the federation model, which may appropriate for bourgeois countries such as Switzerland, Canada, or the United States, but it is an unstable model that constantly threatens to disintegrate. To allay the fears of the Bund, Stalin had to work hard and it was the category of class that would do the work for him. Federalism was off the agenda, except perhaps as a temporary measure (Stalin 1917d; 1917b; 1918e, 72–73; 1918d, 74–75), as was a unitary bourgeois state that sought assimilate minorities. Instead, class is the primary principle, specifically the working class and its dictatorship. Everything flows from this category, leading to diversity through unity. To be clear, Stalin's point is that the totalising unity of the proletariat produces hitherto unexpected levels of diversity. This is the principle that would come to be manifested in the structural features of the Soviet Union, to which I now turn.

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## 5.4 Preferential Policies for Minority Nationalities

This dialectical principle would become manifest in the concrete preferential policies for minority nationalities in the Soviet Union.[10] For Stalin, it is precisely the dictatorship of the proletariat that is the means for enabling such an approach: "the victory of the Soviets and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship are a fundamental condition for abolishing national oppression, establishing national equality and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities" (Stalin 1921c, 19; 1921f, 20; see also 1923j, 262–263; 1923i, 269–270; 1925a, 137–140; 1925c, 140–142).

### 5.4.1 Enactment of Preferential Policies for Minority Nationalities

The preferential policies and associated governing structures entailed a comprehensive effort at social, cultural, and economic re-creation. It is only with China that we can find a comparable project in terms of thoroughness and scale. Minorities were identified, named, and established in territories, where local language, culture, education, and governance were fostered. Dispersed minorities with no territory were provided with strong legal

protections. The term “re-creation” is very appropriate, since it was very much a creative act, in which the task of identification entailed the rediscovery and re-creation of groups, peoples, and nationalities. As the report to the Communist Party’s fifteenth congress of 1931 observed, this involved “the creation of new nationalities” out of groups that had been so thoroughly assimilated that they had “earlier never dreamed of national existence” (quoted in Martin 2001, 155–156). This feature of the policies becomes clear with the interchangeable use of the terms *politika* (policy) and *stroitel’stvo* (construction), as we find—for example—with language policy (*iazykovaia politika*) and language construction (*iazykovoe stroitel’stvo*). Indeed, in some cases languages had to be recreated, written forms developed for those with only an oral language, leading to the development of new types of literature, education, and culture. In other words, the process was understood as the deliberate intervention by ethnologists and socialists into the process of producing and developing a new society and structures of governance, within which nationalities were central (Reznik 2003, 34; Slezkine 2000, 323–324). Most of the material concerning Soviet affirmative action involves policies, research teams, concrete programs, government departments (central and local) and the many significant achievements and mistakes made in the process.[11]

Theoretically, this approach goes back to the early platform (1903) of the Russian Social Democrats: “The right of the population to receive instruction in their native tongue, to be realised by the provision, at the expense of the state and the organs of self-government, of the necessary schools; the right of every citizen to use his native language at assemblies; the introduction of native languages on a par with the official language in all local social and state institutions” (RSDLP 1903, 290; see also Stalin 1904a, 159–160; 1904b, 42). At this stage, the platform was consciously developed in response to tsarist repression, which was as much targeted at religious minorities as it was at national minorities (Stalin 1917c, 64; 1917a, 17). However, it also required positive elaboration, which involved social recreation and the socialist imperative to foster local languages, cultures, education, and political leadership; raising the border regions to socialism; and was as such seen as a “cultural revolution.” It was also embodied in the constitutions of 1924 and 1936.

Earlier, I pointed out that the Bolsheviks used the terms *politika* (policy) and *stroitel’stvo* (construction) interchangeably, seeing their task as an

immense one of social and economic recreation. Or, as Stalin put it elsewhere:

> We stand for the preferential policies [*pokrovitel'stvennaia politika*] in relation to the development of the national cultures of the backward nationalities. I emphasize this so that [it will] be understood that we are not indifferent, but actively supporting [*pokrovitel'stvuiushchie*] the development of national culture (Stalin, quoted in Martin 2001, 17).

Was this process a hubristic effort at "social engineering," recreating peoples, languages, and nationalities even where they had been so thoroughly assimilated that they can be said to have no longer "existed"? Not at all, for the Soviet Union witnessed the first real effort in human history to create a whole new mode of production, not merely in terms of its economics but also society, culture, and political structures. The Marxist framework for Stalin's thought, and indeed the whole Bolshevik program, embodied the insight that any mode of production or social formation is as much constructed as it is given. Or rather, such a mode of production may provide the context by which people are formed, but human beings shape the mode of production and social system in question; or, to gloss Marx and make us wary of naturalising any social formation, we may be subject to the given circumstances of the past, but we make our own history (Marx 1852a, 96–97; 1852b, 103).

With these background developments and clear policies, a major feature of the reconstruction entailed the establishment of autonomous territories and regions where there were identifiable nationalities. As for dispersed minorities, even within such regions, they were provided with a strong framework of protections, including stiff penalties for any form of racial denigration and abuse.[12] They too—in a program of indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*)[13]—should be able to use their own languages, operate their own schools, law-courts, and soviets, and have freedom of conscience in matters relating to religion.[14] Across the Soviet Union, such programs cost millions and billions of roubles, leading to the wholesale re-creation of cultures, as well as leading to a whole new range of problems not experienced thus far (Slezkine 2000, 322–323). A good example of this process concerns the indigenous Mordvinians: they had been highly

assimilated, but took advantage of the affirmative action program to claim a distinct identity and were granted an autonomous oblast in 1929 (Martin 2001, 52). Within the vast expanses of what would become by 1924 the Soviet Union, this example was not unique. The task of delineating and fostering nationalities generated a plethora of autonomous republics and regions (*oblast* or *okrug*), national districts of 25,000 to 10,000 people, and even village Soviets with as few as 500 people (Martin 2001, 10, 38). Needless to say, there was continual debate as to who belonged to which group, to what the various levels and groups were entitled, and constant alterations and refinements. Further, the whole program may always not have lived up to some of its lofty aims, since the path was strewn with immense hurdles and setbacks. Yet its achievements were significant.

That it should undergo constant adaptation is no surprise, since such a project of social construction produced profound changes in the nature of the groups in question. This process of transformation leads to the next point: the task of "raising" the cultural, social, and economic level of the minority nationalities, especially those who were in the border regions of the Soviet Union. At times, the framing of this effort to raise standards of living, society, and culture has a paternalistic tone: "backward" peoples should be brought up, should "catch up" to the same level as "advanced" peoples, in terms of economic, political, and cultural organisation (Stalin 1921h, 39; 1921 g, 39). More often, the whole project was seen as an extraordinary effort to bring minority nationalities to the level of socialism within a short period (Stalin 1919a, 237–239; 1919b, 246–248; 1921b, 59; 1921a, 59–60; 1925a, 136–137; 1925c, 138–139). Some regions and their nationalities may still have a pastoral economy and patriarchal-tribal ways of life, while others may have semi-patriarchal and semi-feudal structures (Stalin 1921c, 25; 1921f, 26; 1921 h, 46; 1921g, 46; 1923f, 187–189; 1923e, 190–191). To raise them to the new and still developing level of socialism actually meant taking them directly from much earlier modes of production (tribal society and feudalism) to socialism (Stalin 1921h, 41; 1921g, 41). However, this task should and indeed could be achieved only by taking into account their specific economic situations, class structures, cultures, and manners of life. So we find stipulations that the minority nationalities in question should develop and strengthen their Soviet statehood in light of their particular conditions; establish courts, administration, economic organisations, and organs of governance; foster

presses, schools, theatres, recreation clubs, and cultural and educational institutions—all of the above operating with the local language and staffed with local people who understand the specifics of local habits and customs (Stalin 1921e, 2; 1921d, 2; 1921c, 24; 1921f, 25; 1923a, 298; 1923c, 304).

In other words, as the project of preferential policies for minority nationalities gained in specificity and scope, it was also connected with raising minority nationalities to a socialist level, or—better—having them join the others on the long socialist road. This dimension is summed up in the definition of "cultural revolution," which has a specific sense as "the cultural development of the working class and of the masses of the working peasantry, not only the development of literacy, although literacy is the basis of all culture, but primarily the cultivation of the ability to take part in the administration of the country" (Stalin 1927f, 322; 1927d, 330–331).[15] At one level, this type of cultural revolution applies to the many urban and rural workers, but at another level it applies to the minority nationalities, especially those in the border regions, and entails improving their economic well-being and raising their cultural and political sensibilities so as to be commensurate with other parts of the constantly developing socialist system (Stalin 1925a, 136–137; 1925c, 138–139; 1925d, 207–208; 1925b, 210–211).

### 5.4.2 Implications for the Structures of Socialist Governance

Thus far, I have presented some of the main features of the extraordinary development of preferential policies for minority nationalities. But these were not merely policies developed and enacted by the government, for they also had profound ramifications in the structures of governance itself. Let us begin with constitutions of 1924 and 1936. As background to the 1924 constitution, the "Declaration of the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," which was ratified on 30 December, 1922, clearly states that the dictatorship of the proletariat serves to "eradicate national oppression, to create an atmosphere of mutual confidence, and to lay the foundation for the fraternal co-operation of peoples" (Congress of Soviets 1922b, 393; 1922a, 403). This declaration would come to form the preamble to the 1924 constitution, and would be elaborated in the constitution of 1936. In this constitution—renowned for embodying the world's first statements on the rights of women, the rights to work, social insurance, rest and leisure, holidays, medical care, and education, as well as

for the proactive nature of these rights—we also find stipulations concerning minority nationalities. These include governing structures in the autonomous republics, as well as autonomous regions, areas, districts, cities and rural localities (articles 89 to 101). Further, the crucial article 123 states:

> Equality of rights of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law.
>
> Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or, conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for, citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law (Supreme Soviet 1936b, stat'ia 123; 1936a, Article 123).

Constitutions do not emerge out of thin air, for they respond to and shape the structures of governance. I am particularly interested in the development of the two legislative bodies. In the Soviet Union, the 1924 constitution clarified the emerging reality of two bodies of government. In this constitution, the first was called the Federal Soviet and the second—importantly—the Soviet of Nationalities. By 1936, the two soviets were known as the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. Together they formed the Supreme Soviet, which was the highest legislative body. For any proposal—even from the Central Committee of the Communist Party—to become law, it had to be approved by both bodies of the Supreme Soviet.

In later chapters, we will find that there still remained much work to be done for rule-of-law statutory procedures, especially as they were developed in China so that its bodies of governance had effective and comprehensive legislative power. But let us focus on the Soviet of Nationalities, a constituent feature of the USSR from the moment of its inception. What was its composition? In the 1924 constitution, article 15 stipulated that it is composed of "representatives of the member Republics and associated autonomous Republics," with five representatives from the former and one from the latter. By 1936, the preferential policies had achieved relative maturity, so much so that article 35 of this constitution

stipulates elections “according to Union and Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Regions and national areas on the basis of twenty-five deputies from each Union Republic, eleven deputies from each Autonomous Republic, five deputies from each Autonomous Region and one deputy from each national area” (Supreme Soviet 1936b, stat’ia 35; 1936a, Article 35). Clearly, the structures of governance in the Soviet Union explicitly included the many nationalities that were part of the union. Further, the Soviet of Nationalities had legislative power from the very beginning, not only in terms of approving bills, but also for the sake of initiating legislation. And all legislation had to be published in all the languages spoken in the Union.

Obviously, this measure could very well lead to problems, in that the two soviets may not agree on legislation. Usually, this was not an issue, due to extensive consultation beforehand to ensure agreement. Nonetheless, there was a specific measure to deal with a potential deadlock. This measure had a series of steps: (1) a conciliation commission was to meet with equal representation from both soviets; (2) if the commission failed to reach agreement, the legislation had to be debated and voted upon in both soviets for a second time; (3) if the two soviets still could not agree, new elections had to be ordered by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet (Supreme Soviet 1936b, stat’ia 47; 1936a, Article 47). The potential for deadlock was not a problem during periods of stability, but by the 1980s it became an intractable problem with the drive to independence by some of the republics. As we will see, the Chinese approach was to vest all legislative power in the People’s National Congress, which is similar to the Soviet of the Union. The other body became—due to the specific nature of China’s revolutionary history—the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Comprised of all minority nationalities, other political parties, religious groups, and so on, the CPPCC has wide-ranging consultative powers, but not legislative power.

Despite these differences, we will see that the structures of governance in socialist countries would by and large follow a similar model. There would be two bodies of governance, with one of them specifically designated for representation by minority nationalities, along with other groups. This is as true of the Soviet Union as it is of China, although we will find that the DPRK has one legislative body.

## 5.5 Anti-colonial Struggles for National Liberation

The final part of this chapter concerns an insight with immense significance for the global communist movement: the October Revolution and the preferential policies of the Soviet Union provided a microcosm of the global anti-colonial struggle against capitalist imperialism.[16] This insight is in many respects a concrete confirmation—based on practical experience and consequent theoretical reflection—of Marx and Engels's resolute emphasis on anti-colonial struggles for national liberation as inescapably connected with class struggle. It is also a logical conclusion of this chapter as a whole: the focus on class provides a dialectical approach to the national question; this led to the world's first preferential policies for minority nationalities and an important structural feature of socialist governance; the next step was to apply this logic to anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. In 1921, Stalin observed that it was "the Communists who first revealed the connection between the national question and the question of the colonies, who proved it theoretically and made it the basis of their practical revolutionary activities" (Stalin 1921b, 53; 1921a, 53). Note carefully the structure of this sentence: the connection between nationalities and colonialism arose from concrete practice, leading to theoretical proof and then application to international revolutionary and anti-capitalist activity. In short, practice leads to theoretical reflection which leads to further practice.

### 5.5.1 Emergence of the Insight into Anti-colonial Struggles

This theoretical breakthrough took some time to emerge, so let us follow the path of emergence. Already in 1918, in an article called "The October Revolution and the National Question" (Stalin 1918c; 1918f), Stalin noted the uprisings—inspired by the Russian Revolution—in Austria-Hungary and Germany and saw them as the beginning of much wider revolutionary activity in the common struggle against imperialism. At this point, it is possible to attribute such a position to the widespread expectation of a European revolution of which the Russian Revolution was the harbinger. But then Stalin points out that a focus on Western Europe would entail missing the real revolutionary upsurge, which was happening in "the East."

Does he mean the eastern parts of Russia, part of the "border regions"? No, he moves beyond the orbit of Russian influence: "the East" is a term for all peoples oppressed by colonialist imperialism, including "China, India, Persia, Egypt and Morocco" (Stalin 1918b, 172; 1918a, 175; see also 1923d, 178–179; 1923b, 182; 1923j, 237–238, 163; 1923i, 243, 268; 1925a, 133–134; 1925c, 135–136). It is now possible to make explicit the connection between the national question and anti-colonial struggles: "Thus, from the particular question of combating national oppression, the national question is evolving into the general question of emancipating the nations, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism" (Stalin 1918c, 165; 1918f, 168). Fully aware of this crucial breakthrough, Stalin repeats the point in the conclusion to this speech, where he observes that the October Revolution had widened the scope of the national question, converting it from "combating national oppression in Europe into the general question of emancipating the oppressed peoples, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism" (Stalin 1918c, 166; 1918f, 170; see also 1927a, 170; 1927c, 175).

In light of this breakthrough concerning the "international significance of the national question" (Stalin 1923j, 238; 1923i, 241), Stalin began to examine further dimensions in works from the 1920s. Thus, in "Concerning the Presentation of the National Question" of 1921, he castigates socialists, especially of the Second International, for restricting their concerns over the national question to "civilised" nations, such as the Irish, Czechs, Poles, Finns, Serbs, Armenians, and Jews, thereby neglecting the millions upon millions of oppressed peoples in Asia and Africa. These global second-class citizens were not even on the radar of such socialists, except perhaps as an assumed colonial prop for the sake of maintaining "civilisation." By contrast, it was precisely revolutionary communists who had first revealed the inescapable link between national question internal to a country such as the Soviet Union and the colonies. Even more, this theoretical proof became "the basis of their practical revolutionary activities" (Stalin 1921b, 53; 1921a, 53). Many of the same points are also mentioned in "The Foundations of Leninism" from 1924, where Stalin observes that the "national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal state problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of the liberation of the oppressed peoples in the dependent

countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism" (Stalin 1924a, 139; 1924b, 144).

### 5.5.2 Attacking the "Rear" of Capitalist Imperialism

The key is capitalist imperialism: communists make that their target, thereby connecting the various aspects of capitalist exploitation and uniting the proletarian movement and anti-colonial national liberation movements into a common front. In particular, capitalism relies on the colonies for food and fuel, raw material for industry, markets to sell the items produced, and labour-power. Thus, capitalist imperialism depends upon —here Stalin uses a favoured military metaphor—the "rear" of the colonies for the "war" waged at the "front" (Stalin 1923j, 237; 1923i, 242). It follows that Communist Parties must attack both front and rear: the colonies cannot be liberated without the overthrow of capitalism; so also, national liberation movements in the colonies challenge the rule of capital. Without such activity, the victory of any proletarian revolution is never entirely secure (Stalin 1921b, 57; 1921a, 57; 1923f, 185; 1923e, 187–188; 1924a, 145; 1924b, 150; 1927b, 243; 1927e, 247–248).

A few years later, in "The International Character of the October Revolution" of 1927, Stalin took the argument a step further, with immense implications. In this piece, he begins by arguing that revolutionary anti-colonial struggles for national liberation also happened in Russia. He has in mind the minority nationalities, who were liberated from internal tsarist colonialism as a result of the October Revolution. Without landlords and capitalists to oppress these nationalities, they too were freed in a way similar to the proletariat and the peasantry. While the core position of the leadership and example of the proletarian revolution is maintained, the new note here is that the vast territories of Russia too entailed significant colonisation in the process of expansion across the Eurasian landmass. The next part of the argument is thoroughly dialectical: anti-colonial national liberation can be achieved only through internationalism, or what we may call communist globalisation. Stalin observes that it is "a characteristic feature of the October Revolution that it accomplished these national-colonial revolutions in the U.S.S.R. … not in the name of nationalism, but in the name of internationalism" (Stalin 1927b, 243; 1927e, 248).

### 5.5.3 A New Type of Global Revolution: Concrete Support for Anti-colonial Struggles

These significant theoretical developments did not simply spring from Stalin's head, for they were reflections upon concrete developments. As the decades of the twentieth century unfolded, the Soviet Union became directly involved in anti-colonial struggles around the world. This assistance took many forms, such as educational opportunities and scholarships for students to come to the Soviet Union for study; weapons and military advice for the armed struggle against colonial powers; scientific and technological assistance to recently liberated countries that were seeking to rebuild their industrial base and protect themselves with up-to-date weaponry; advocacy in the United Nations for newly liberated countries to be admitted to membership and promoting resolutions such as the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* (UNGA 1960); and much more. True, at times such assistance caused friction, especially when the Comintern sought to oppose its will on Communist Parties elsewhere engaged in direct struggle (as happened in China), and the colonising powers waged an immense struggle so as to keep their colonies or at least—after liberation—to maintain influence. But it can be said that the spate of successful anti-colonial liberation struggles across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific would not have been so successful without the Soviet Union's support.

In assessing these developments, a number of questions arise. To begin with, these high levels of assistance were a practical necessity. While the Soviet Union remained the world's only socialist country, it would always be the target of imperialist efforts to overthrow Soviet power. In some respects, the ultimate fate of the Soviet Union itself depended on revolutionising the "remote rear" of imperialism through the support of anti-colonial struggles (Stalin 1923j, 236–238; 1923i, 241–243). Second, both the concrete support and theoretical insight concerning anti-colonial struggles may be understand as an unexpected development of global revolution itself. The Bolsheviks had hoped that once the "weakest link" in the capitalist chain was broken, other links would follow. They initially looked westward, to Europe, where the social and economic cost of war was high, social unrest widespread, and genuine possibilities for the revolutionary seizure of power existed in countries such as Germany and Austria-Hungary (Lenin 1917d, 60–61; 1917a, 292–293). It was not be. But

it was particularly Stalin and his circle who began to urge communists to look “east,” to anti-colonial struggles for liberation. Here lay real potential for the global revolution, which was to be realised in East Asia. Thus, the Soviet Union, along with other socialist movements, should “support—resolutely and actively support—the national liberation movement of the oppressed and dependent peoples” (Stalin 1924a, 142; 1924b, 147). And with a characteristic biblical allusion:

> In the past, the oppressed and downtrodden slaves of the vast Roman Empire regarded Christianity as a rock of salvation. We are now reaching the point where socialism may serve (and is already beginning to serve!) as the banner of liberation for the millions who inhabit the vast colonial states of imperialism (Stalin 1923g, 347; 1923h, 354).

Third, the explicit connection between the October Revolution and anti-colonial struggles for national liberation was a confirmation, based on concrete practice, of the insistence by Marx and Engels that class struggle and anti-colonial struggles are closely connected. The connection arose in the Soviet Union via an unexpected path, as I have mapped out in this chapter. But this is to be expected, since Marx and Engels had no concrete experience of socialism in power while the Bolsheviks did have such experience. The remarkable fact is that the result—via debates on the national question, preferential policies for minority nationalities, and the very structures of socialist governance—confirmed the initial impetus from Marx and Engels. As Stalin observed, the existence of socialism is inconceivable “without the liberation of the oppressed nations, without national freedom,” since they are “two sides of one and the same process of liberating the working people from imperialist bondage” (Stalin 1921c, 19–20; 1921f, 20–21).

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## 5.6 Conclusion: On the Right to Secession and Self-determination

To sum up: in explaining how the multi-national state of the Soviet Union developed, I have focused on nationalities as a question that not only shaped the very structures of socialist governance in the Soviet Union, but

also led to a new understanding of the global revolution in terms of anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. After providing some background to debates at the turn of the twentieth century, I dealt with the dialectical argument in Stalin's deeply influential text, "Marxism and the National Question," where he argues that the unifying and international category of class provides the basis for an even greater diversity of nationalities. From here, I focused on the development of the world's first comprehensive preferential policies for minority nationalities and the lasting effect on the structures of governance in socialist countries. Finally, I dealt with the theoretical and practical insight that this internal policy and approach to governance in the Soviet Union had implications for international struggles, specifically in terms of fostering and supporting for anti-colonial struggles for national liberation in the "rear" of capitalist imperialism.

It was indeed "an experiment without parallel hitherto in the world" (Stalin 1920a, 362; 1920b, 375), but there was a particular feature of the preferential policies for minority nationalities that created a "time-bomb" for the Soviet Union: the right to secession. This was connected with the right to self-determination, but the connection would turn out to be a mistake. Let us begin with the right to secession by any union state or autonomous republic, which was an article in all of the three constitutions of 1924, 1936, and 1977. The development of this problem goes back to some of the earliest debates among the Bolsheviks concerning the national question and their opposition to tsarist policies of assimilation in the vast Russian Empire. As an alternative, the Bolsheviks promoted the right to secession, although this had begun to create some hesitations, as Lenin acknowledged:

> We are in favour of autonomy for all parts; we are in favour of the right to secession (and not in favour of everyone's seceding!). Autonomy is our plan for organising a democratic state. Secession is not what we plan at all. We do not advocate secession. In general, we are opposed to secession (Lenin 1913e, 235; 1913a, 500–501).

Lenin seems caught here: while including the right to secession within the framework of advocating autonomy for nationalities, the actual exercise of this right is not to be encouraged. Instead, it was felt that the "force of voluntary attraction" of the new project of socialist construction would be

sufficient (Lenin 1917c, 168; 1917b, 73).[17] Indeed, the concept of voluntary attraction was promoted assiduously, appearing already in the prior constitution of the RSFSR (1918, stat'ia 8). Is this enough? Perhaps, if one includes a series of significant safeguards. It was not to be. By the time the Soviet Union was dissolving through lack of unity in the Communist Party, ideological disarray, and the rise of opportunists into leadership positions, the right to secession was invoked by a number of union states autonomous republics to become the countries they are today (Suny 1993). During the revolutionary turmoil of 1917, Lenin did try to develop a more dialectical approach: "The more democratic the Russian republic, and the more successfully it organises itself into a Republic of Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, the more powerful will be the force of voluntary attraction to such a republic on the part of the working people of all nations" (Lenin 1917c, 168; 1917b, 73). In other words, greater unity is achieved not so much through secession and then willingly rejoining, but precisely through increased autonomy. Even this effort would turn out not to be enough, so that during the instability brought about by the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the 1980s autonomous republics with minority nationalities began seeking and indeed declaring—aided and abetted by capitalist imperialist powers—secession from the Soviet Union. However, the national question has by no means disappeared, for it has continued to be a problem within these newly-minted countries. Each has multiple nationalities and the process of trying form a state has in some cases stumbled and disintegrated precisely because of a failure to resolve the national question.

Earlier, I mentioned that the Bolsheviks connected secession with self-determination. Although the connection may seem obvious, it is by no means necessary. Thus, the Soviet Union was a staunch advocate and vigorous supporter of the right to self-determination by colonised peoples and countries. This right meant that they should and could throw off the colonial yoke and manage their own affairs. Is this the same as secession, in the sense that it is a secession from a colonising power? Not necessarily. Let us consider the problem in this way: in the 1950s, the Soviet Union initially proposed to the United Nations the brief but sharp *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*. The proposal was taken up by African and Asian states and, when the critical mass of newly decolonised countries in the United Nations had been

achieved, it was approved by the UN General Assembly in 1960. Of importance here is the stipulation of territorial integrity: “any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations” (United Nations General Assembly 1960). Clearly, the self-determination of formerly colonised countries is crucial, but so also is territorial integrity. Why? Colonised countries had experienced too often the arbitrary carving up of their countries by imperialist powers, the fostering of “secession” movements, and so on. For example, in the last days of British colonial control over Hong Kong, the imperialist governor tried to foster the “independence” of Hong Kong from the Chinese mainland. The effort turned out to be futile (as we will see in Chap. 10), but it was clearly an imperialist effort to use Hong Kong once again as a lever to destabilise China. It should be no surprise that China does not include the right to secession in its constitution and governance structures. Instead, China’s approach is more fully dialectical: it is precisely through enhanced autonomy of minority nationalities that greater unity and thus strength of the country is achieved.

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# Footnotes

1 For a useful analysis of Bauer in the context of Austro-Marxism, see Egry (2005).

2 In this paragraph, I draw primarily from the work of Frankel (1981, 171–257).

3 We should not be misled here by the limited English perception of “spiritual,” which pertains to religious matters. In Slavic languages, the word’s semantic field refers to the overall spirit of a culture, which may include religion but is certainly not limited to this sense. Compare here the Chinese 精神 *jingshen,* which is also translated as “spiritual,” but refers to vitality, vigour, and drive.

4 Much of the argument in Stalin’s essay is devoted to criticisms of the Austrian Marxists, the Bund, and the Caucasian Mensheviks.

5 In December of 1913, Lenin observed: “This situation and the fundamentals of a national programme for Social-Democracy have recently been dealt with in Marxist theoretical literature (the most prominent place being taken by Stalin’s article)” (Lenin 1913d, 223; 1913f, 539).

6 For example, in Chinese studies of minority nationalities this definition by Stalin is usually quoted as the starting point of the Marxist tradition's approach to nationalities.

7 This position arose in the drawn-out and complex interaction between the Bolsheviks and the Bund. On the hand, Lenin was absolutely consistent in his opposition to anti-Semitism; on the other hand, he was also insistent that the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party should be bound by class and should not be organised as a federation, with the Bund representing Jewish workers. For a detailed assessment, see *Lenin, religion, and theology* (Boer 2013, 27–29).

8 I am concerned here with debates that sought to include nationalities within a socialist state, but there were others, such as Karl Kautsky, who argued that the universal category of class would lead to the abolition of national differences (Kautsky 1907; 2009; 2010).

9 The following is a careful exegesis of the final pages of "Marxism and the national question" (Stalin 1913a, 220–227; 1913b, 373–381).

10 Although there are various translations of *polozhitel'naia deiatel'not'* and *pokrovitel'stvennaia politika*, such as positive or favourable action and policies, I have opted for "preferential policies." The following material draws on an earlier study (Boer 2016).

11 Substantial material in English, based on extensive archival research, is now available concerning these policies. I recommend Martin (2001) for the sheer volume of detailed archival material, although his assessments and ideological proclivities are wanting. One should also consult Hirsch's study (2005) for the sake of the immense ethnographic efforts, the participatory processes characteristics of such policies, and the details of the new project of defining and determining such nationalities.

12 During the Second World War, Stalin explicitly contrasted the emphasis on racial equality in the Soviet Union, and indeed the strong penalties for any manifestation of racism, with fascist racial hatred (Stalin 1942b, 97; 1942a, 31; 1944a, 198; 1944b, 384–385).

13 *Korenizatsiia*, a term coined by communist scholars and policy-makers, is "derived directly not from the stem *koren-* ('root'—with the meaning 'rooting') but from its adjectival form *korennoi* as used in the phrase *korennoi narod* (indigenous people)" (Martin 2001, 11–12).

14 By the mid-1930s the Jews were also identified as a nationality with a territory, in the Jewish Autonomous district in Birobidzhan (Supreme Soviet 1936b, stat'ia 22; 1936a, Article 22). This importance of this move (part of Crimea had also been proposed) is rarely recognised, for it was the first move to Jewish territory in the modern era (Pinkus 1988, 71–76).

15 For a case study of the aims and practical limitations of "cultural revolution" of the 1920s and 1930s among workers at the Leningrad, see Kokosalakis (2022, 140–152).

16 Six decades ago, E. H. Carr noted the anti-colonial feature of Soviet policy as a "natural and logical extension of national policy" (Carr 1953, 3:234–235).

17 Note also: "Thus, *from* the breakdown of the old imperialist unity, *through* independent Soviet republics, the peoples of Russia are coming *to* a new, voluntary and fraternal unity" (Stalin 1919c, 229; 1919d, 237).

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# 7. Democracy and a “Socialist State”

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## 7.1 Opening Remarks

The main concern of this chapter is to examine how some core components of socialist democracy were developed in the Soviet Union, especially in the 1920 and 1930s. This analysis requires a preliminary assessment of Stalin’s contribution to the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which he largely followed Lenin. The longest part of the chapter concerns socialist democracy, and I distinguish between four components. The first is electoral democracy, with a focus on the campaign surrounding the 1936 constitution to promote universal, multi-candidate contested elections to the many levels of soviets, from the local to the Supreme Soviet. In assessing the successes and failures of the campaign, I identify two principles that emerged and which would have a lasting influence: non-politicised elections based on merit; and the supervisory role of electoral democracy. The second component is consultative democracy, which was in many respects the major contribution from the Soviet Union to socialist governance. Here, I examine practices of participatory democratic practices in factories, the armed forces, and the countryside, through the all-important Primary Party Organisations (PPOs). These emerged through the Party building exercise after the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War and achieved maturation through some of the most tumultuous phases of socialist construction. A third component concerns some steps in developing a Marxist approach to human rights, specifically in terms of the right to

freedom from exploitation (socio-economic well-being) and the proactive nature of rights. The fourth component concerns a reality that emerged through historical experience: any viable socialist democracy requires the leadership of the Communist Party. This reality raised considerable questions concerning ongoing legitimacy, moving from the historical legitimacy of winning power through a proletarian revolution to the practical legitimacy of socialist governance. The final section draws together all of the material in this and the previous chapter to see what is meant by a "socialist state." I focus in particular on Stalin's report to the Party's Eighteenth Congress in 1939, where he identifies a second stage of socialist construction and the nature of what is clearly identified as a socialist state after the basic features of a socialist system had been established. This increasing usage of "socialist state" leads to a contradiction: at the very same time, it was becoming clearer that the distinction between state and society was blurring, or indeed withering away. The organs of governance, through the Communist Party, were increasingly standing in the midst of society—as Engels had already stipulated.

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## 7.2 Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Before dealing substantively with socialist democracy, a few brief observations of the dictatorship of the proletariat are in order. In the chapter on Lenin, we saw that the Marxist staple of the dictatorship of the proletariat became a distinguishing feature of the early days of Soviet power. While the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War had obliterated the former landlord and ruling class, the proletarian dictatorship became more closely associated with the iron discipline of class-conscious workers, who were to bring the remaining workers and peasants along the socialist road. At the same time, the dictatorship of the proletariat was inescapably associated with the emerging forms of substantive worker democracy. This was a concrete realisation of Engels's emphasis on the role of socialist *Gewalt*; the equation of the Paris Commune with the proletarian dictatorship; and the focus on administering the stuff of life for the true interests of society.

By and large, Stalin followed Lenin on the question of proletarian dictatorship.[1] Thus, it is through the intensification of the proletarian

dictatorship that democracy and freedom arise.[2] As Stalin puts it: "if there is no such dictatorship, our country cannot be free and independent" (Stalin 1925b, 3, 1925c, 3). How does this intensification work? The stronger the power (*Gewalt → vlast'*), the stronger is the freedom, democracy, and indeed national liberation. Stalin is not one to avoid the hard truth, especially in light of revolutionary struggle and the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War: establishing power requires violence at times, specifically for the purpose of expropriating and smashing the capitalists and landlords (Stalin 1925a, 189, 1925d, 186). In this sense, Stalin's approach is no different from that of Engels: the exercise of socialist *Gewalt* is the condition for freedom, democracy and independence. Stalin also followed Lenin, at least in the 1920s, in seeing dictatorship of the proletariat as a defining feature of what Lenin already called the "proletarian state" and the "socialist state." For example, in his "Foundations of Leninism," Stalin stressed that, by embracing all workers and peasants, Soviet power was the strongest and the only form of the state—a new type of state—that could secure victory (Stalin 1924b, 118–122, 1924c, 121–126).[3]

At the same time, Stalin always emphasised that the proletarian dictatorship is by no means a permanent reality, but should be seen as transitional. It is not an end in itself, but a "means, a way of achieving socialism" (Stalin 1925a, 161, 1925d, 159). By the 1920s, the Communist Party had rapidly gained experience in what the transitional phase actually entailed: the seizure of the machinery of state and the means of production so as to dispossess, defeat, and crush the bourgeoisie (Stalin 1927a, b, c, d); dispossession as the prerequisite for socialist construction, which meant class violence as a path to peace (Stalin 1926a, 33, 1926b, 31); and it would provide the conditions for the eventual realisation of communism (Stalin 1924b, 108–116, 1924c, 112–120). I would like to emphasise the transitional nature of the proletarian dictatorship. The reader will have noticed that all of the references in this brief section are to the 1920s, during a time when Stalin was heavily engaged in defining Lenin's legacy as "Leninism," which would later become "Marxism-Leninism." Despite his initial observations in the 1920s that the proletarian dictatorship would last for quite a while, by the 1930s the terminology began to drop out of public discussion and reflection (Van Ree 2002, 140–141). True, the second article of the 1936 constitution does mention the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it does so in more historical terms, as a stage after the October Revolution.

More significantly, Stalin's reflections on the constitution—in reply to criticisms that it had either been abandoned or was enhanced—imply a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the proletarian dictatorship in light of the further development of socialism (Stalin 1936c, 135–136, 1936d, 177–179). In other words, it underlies the new realities of socialist governance, but has been qualitatively transformed or even transcended by what was called a "socialist state."

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## 7.3 Socialist Democracy

We now turn to the most substantial section of the chapter, which concerns the practice and theory of socialist democracy. I will deploy a crucial distinction: electoral and consultative democracy. The two are both distinct and mutually reinforcing. We may add "grassroots" democracy to the consultative form, and there are further components, such as (Marxist) human rights, and the inescapable leadership of the Communist Party. I will deal with of these components in the material that follows, but let us consider to the distinction between electoral and consultative democracy. I have drawn the distinction from Chinese scholarship, and use it here so as to deploy a consistent terminology in the remainder of the book. This will enable me to assess the consistencies of socialist governance in its many manifestations, the problems and shortfalls, and the significant developments from the early years of the Soviet Union to the present day in other socialist countries. As I make use of the distinction between electoral and consultative democracy, a number of points need to be kept in mind. First, the interaction of electoral and consultative democracy reminds us of the fact that the Western liberal tradition restricts "democracy" to periodic elections. This is a terribly thin notion of democracy and distorts what the term itself means. Second, as we shall see, the Soviet Union would make a greater contribution to consultative democracy rather than electoral democracy. Third, it also took some significant steps in the development of a Marxist approach to human rights, and—fourth—the historical the experience of governing the world's first socialist country made it abundantly clear that any form of viable socialist governance needs the leadership of the Communist Party.

### 7.3.1 Electoral Democracy

Due to a number of factors, the Soviet Union came to place the greatest emphasis on consultative democracy rather than electoral democracy. To understand why, we need to address the background to this relative lack of emphasis on electoral democracy, especially in light of the campaign of the 1930s to promote multi-candidate, universal elections with secret ballots.

In terms of background, Lenin had preferred a definition of democracy that was participatory and consultative, rather than one simply based on elections. Citizens would participate and supervise, all the way from the workplace to the organs of governance. Based on his interpretation of the Paris Commune, there would be elections as well as the right to recall (Lenin 1917a, c, e, g). But this was seen as a feature of participatory supervision rather than a definition of democracy per se. Indeed, Lenin frequently lambasted the deceptions and emptiness of bourgeois parliamentary democracy with its singular focus on elections, which functioned not merely to conceal but to further the control of capitalist bosses. In other words, such democracy and its supposed freedoms was a dictatorship of the small community of the free over the vast majority of those who are unfree (Losurdo 2011, 248). This criticism of elections and the "ballot box" was exacerbated by the sharp differences that emerged between Lenin and Karl Kaustky, with the latter dismissing Soviet Power as undemocratic and Lenin replying that Kautsky had retreated to a non-revolutionary position that relied on the Party's success in the bourgeois electoral system (Kautsky 1918a, b; Lenin 1918a, b).

A further background factor is that the historical path of the first years of Soviet power were certainly not conducive to instituting electoral democracy. The Party needed iron discipline to stave off collapse due to war, food shortages, internal sabotage, and then the brutal Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War. Electoral democracy was clearly off the agenda. In fact, the conditions favoured and indeed consolidated participatory consultative democracy. Primary Party Organisations (PPOs) were critical for ensuring the initial revolutionary success and the establishment of Soviet power, and for dealing with the multiple challenges of the early years. Further, a key factor in the success of the Red Army was the ability to mobilise significant numbers of peasants in the White areas on the side of the communists, since the peasants were hardly going to support forces that would reinstate former patterns of oppression and exploitation. By the time the Communist Party was emerging from all of these struggles in the early

1920s, it would launch the controversial NEP to enable some rudimentary economic recovery, before turning to the massive "socialist offensive" in the late 1920s. This extraordinary and disruptive effort, carried out at a "Bolshevik tempo [*bol'shevistskie tempy*]" (Stalin 1931b, 75, 1931c, 73; 1932a, 142, 1932b, 140), turned the Soviet Union into an industrialised economic powerhouse.

It was only after all these hard-won achievements that some stability was at last felt, and electoral democracy could be reconsidered.[4] The initial signal came at the Party's Seventeenth Congress in 1934, which noted not merely the achievements of the last few years, but also directed attention to the political tasks ahead (Stalin 1934a, 347–379, 1934b, 353–388). Proposals concerning socialist democracy were initially debated within the Politburo in January 1935, and articles began appearing in leading journals, addressing directly the topic of Soviet democracy (Zhukov 2003, 116–121; Kokosalakis 2020, 83–84). By June 1935, a constitutional drafting committee was established. The committee produced five drafts—all of them painstakingly checked by Stalin—before a final draft was made available for public discussion in June 1936. The final constitution would stipulate in its eleventh chapter that all levels of soviets, from the supreme to the district, city, and rural, would be "chosen by the electors on the basis of universal, direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot" (Supreme Soviet 1936a, article 134, 1936b, stat'ia 134). The subsequent articles in this chapter spell out what each of these terms meant in practice, including the process of nominating candidates, who would come from "public organisations and societies of the working people: Communist Party organisations, trade unions, cooperatives, youth organisations and cultural societies" (Supreme Soviet 1936a, article 141, 1936b, stat'ia 141).

The idea of direct and multi-candidate elections to all bodies was initially made public in the first months of 1936, especially by Stalin in an interview with Roy Howard in March (see more below) of that year, and was then pressed further at a Central Committee Plenum in June of 1936, where it met with little overt support (Zhukov 2003, 232–236; Kokosalakis 2020, 86). Even more, the public debate around specifically this measure before its final adoption was immense.[5] Multiple articles in leading magazines and newspapers were published, and there were countless public meetings around the country. This effort was not a smokescreen for the increasing campaign for Party discipline, which would explode with the

purges and trials of 1937–1938; instead, all of the evidence points to the fact that Stalin and those close to him were resiliently dedicated to the electoral reforms (Getty 1991). Stiff resistance there was, especially within the Party from those who stood most to lose (Zhukov 2003, 211), and this was one significant factor that led to restricting non-Party candidates to 20–25% and eventually the practice of having single Party-endorsed candidates for elections. The other major factor was Hitler's invasion in 1941 and the Soviet Union's entry into the European theatre of war.

Many were the vectors that came together at this time. As the careful study by Kokosalakis (2022, 168–210) shows, there were tensions in the workplace, with PPOs putting increasing pressure on managers in light of drives to greater efficiency and productivity (Stakhanovism); the effort to tighten Party discipline had revealed shocking laxness, especially in regional areas; the campaign for electoral democracy had emboldened anti-communist elements to cause trouble for Soviet power through the elections; the international situation was worsening in light of Hitler's effort to construct an anti-communist coalition; and the violent storm of trials and purges of 1937–1938 was about to be unleashed against internal and externally-sponsored "wreckers."

Of most interest here are two principles of electoral democracy that emerged from the maelstrom of events: merit and democratic supervision. These were most clearly expressed in two pieces by Stalin, one in the interview with Roy Howard in March 1936, and the other in his reply to debates at the Central Committee Plenum of February–March 1937. The contexts of these two texts are distinct, one an interview with an international correspondent and the other in reply to the sceptics in the Central Committee concerning elections. But the points are consistent.

First, merit, which has two dimensions: the "political principle," asking whether those workers chosen are "worthy of political confidence"; and the "business principle," in the sense the people elected should be "fit for such and such a job" (Stalin 1937c, 279, 1937d, 176). In the address to the Central Committee Plenum, Stalin points out that elections based on competence or merit would be a way to break up the corrupt fiefdoms of local Party officials. However, there is a far deeper issue: *if elections are based on merit, they are no longer politicised*. This measure harks back to Marx's observation (see Sect. 2.5.2) concerning the need for non-politicised elections in a socialist system. To recall the logic: since a socialist system is

not characterised by class struggle and thus antagonistic political parties, elections would not have the antagonistic nature found in capitalist democracy. This is precisely the point Stalin makes in his reply to Howard: "We have no contending parties any more than we have a capitalist class contending against a working class which is exploited by the capitalists." How then can one have an election contest? To begin with, "candidates will be put forward not only by the Communist Party, but by all sorts of public, non-Party organisations," of which there hundreds (Stalin 1936a, 111, 1936b, 145). We may add here that elections would be competitive due to the relative merit of the candidates. This is a clearly step further than Marx's initial suggestions. For Stalin, in competitive elections, the candidate most qualified—in terms of political and administrative merit—should be elected. This is the first major step in defining the nature of elections in a socialist system.

The second concerns democratic supervision. As Stalin observes to Howard, there would be "very lively elections campaigns." Why? Not a few institutions "work badly," where a local governing body has failed to provide for the "multifarious and growing requirements of the toilers of town and country." Stalin looks forward to the types of questions that will be asked: "Have you built a good school or not … improved housing conditions … helped to make our labour more effective and our lives more cultured?" Focused on numerous, acute, and practical problems, elections would "tighten up" the many institutions and organisations so that they would improve their work (Stalin 1936a, 112, 1936b, 146–147). This is not merely seen as an effective anti-corruption mechanism, but is also the democratic role of criticism and self-criticism at work.

In his reply to the Central Committee Plenum, Stalin frames the question of democratic supervision in terms of testing workers in responsible positions by assessing and verifying the concrete results of their work. It is one thing for such testing and verification to be undertaken "from above," by higher levels in the Party. But this is by no means sufficient. What is needed is the "test from below." When the masses assess the achievements and failures of their leaders, then the masses "draw attention to their mistakes and indicate the way in which these mistakes may be rectified." For Stalin, this "sort of testing is one of the most effective methods of testing people" (Stalin 1937c, 282, 1937d, 179; see also Zhukov 2003, 211). He compares this process to the practice of

democratic centralism in the Party, where the right to nominate candidates and object to them is practised, where secret ballots and the freedom to criticise and indeed self-criticise are the reality. So also with the masses, who have the opportunity at meetings and conferences to hear reports from their leaders in the workplace, trade unions, and other bodies, and openly criticise the work of these leaders and propose ways for improvement. The Party may have the task of teaching the masses, but it must also learn from the masses.

The importance of these two principles should not be under-estimated: the practice of non-politicised elections based on merit, which develops the initial principle proposed by Marx and Engels; and the crucial role of democratic supervision through elections. We should also note here an initial effort to extend the Party's internal mechanism of democratic centralism to country-wide governance. Stalin speaks of multiple candidates, secret ballots, and public criticism—these too should be practised country-wide in elections to the government bodies through "universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage" (Stalin 1937c, 282, 1937d, 179). It would take far more practice and theoretical elaboration well beyond the time of Soviet Union to find a solution to country-wide democratic centralism, but the two principles of merit as the basis for election to office and democratic supervision would become mainstays of socialist governance.

The drive for electoral democracy did not long live up to its lofty aims, with the most embarrassing retreat being from multi-candidate contested elections to single-candidate elections. At the same time, there was an even greater effort to ensure democratic accountability through elections internal to the Party. These long-lasting moves are reflected in the comprehensive revisions to the Party rules proposed by Zhdanov at the eighteenth congress in 1939. Earlier drafts of the rules were discussed widely at grassroots meetings and in pre-congress publications, and were ratified in final form at the congress (Kokosalakis 2020, 90–91, 2022, 226–234). As for country-wide electoral democracy, it would fall to other socialist countries to develop this feature much further. As they did so, they took up and developed the two principles of non-politicised elections based on merit and democratic supervision, which is vital for the long-term legitimacy of the Communist Party.

### 7.3.2 Consultative Democracy

Far more significant than the faltering efforts at electoral democracy was the major contribution made by the Soviet Union to consultative democracy. As we have seen in the chapter on Lenin (Sects. 3.3.3 and 3.4.2), already in the early years of Soviet power there were significant developments in the workplace in what is variously called "Party activism" and "worker democracy." As indicated above, I use the terminology of consultative democracy for the sake of consistency with later chapters on the DPRK and China. Consultative democracy was realised through the all-important Primary Party Organisations (PPOs) in city workplaces, the countryside, and in the armed forces. Made up of common people far from the centres of power, the PPOs were seen as the vanguard of the Party's socialist transformation, and they did so through myriad meetings and campaigns. These PPOs were also significant for the multi-layered enmeshment of the Communist Party within society, which led to a distinct blurring of the lines between state and society and indeed the beginnings of governance standing in the midst of society.

In this section, I will summarise the breakthrough archival work of Yiannis Kokosalakis (2022), who is the first to focus on the Party's grassroots and their active engagement from the earliest days.[6] The grassroots organisations, manifested in PPOs, provided vital support for Party policies and mobilisations, while at the same time supervising its implementation through processes of robust criticism (usually of managerial slackness) and alternative suggestions. Herein lay a contradiction that needed to be handled carefully: "the party grassroots moved politically closer to the leadership the more they disorganised policy implementation by getting involved in it" (Kokosalakis 2022, 9).

The major focus of Kokosalakis's study is the Red Putilovite (*Krasnii Putilovets*) machine building plant in Leningrad, which was a massive factory that in many ways set the pace for Soviet industrial technology. It was as capable of producing tractors and farm equipment in the drive to agricultural mechanisation, as it was of producing tanks and military equipment when required. The factory's huge Party branch, or PPO, consistently had more than 1,000 members throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Kokosalakis's enthralling study of the factory's PPO takes us through some of the most tumultuous phases of the early years of socialist construction. It begins with the initial efforts after the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War to

rebuild the Party, the NEP project of the 1920s that sought to get some legs under the devastated economy, the socialist offensive launched with the First Five-Year Plan in 1929, the educational and cultural revolution of the 1930s, the effort to promote electoral democracy (see above), which was coterminous with the massive and violent purge in the later 1930s, and the final phase of consolidation as preparations were made for defending the Soviet Union from invasion.

Throughout these extraordinary years, the PPOs were not only vital for the Party's deep integration with the working masses, but also underwent a process of maturation to become an established feature of all socialist democratic systems since. Kokosalakis emphasises that the leadership in the Central Committee always recognised and fostered the role of PPOs, although it was not always a smooth relationship. Let us follow the story in a little more detail.

I have addressed the initial phase, from 1921, in the chapter in Lenin, so there is no need to repeat that material here. However, I do want to emphasise certain features pertinent to consultative democracy. This was a period of rebuilding the Party and of reconnecting with workers, which was enabled through a purge of membership and then a massive membership drive. Many were the new recruits, more than doubling the Party's membership, and many were the problems that arose from such growth. It is no surprise that what has come to be known as Party-building became a key concern. The main period is from the Party's Tenth Congress in 1921 to Stalin's lectures on Leninism in 1924. During this time, we find the contours of Party-building emerging, with membership drives, purges when needed, discipline, democracy, and ideological education of an active membership. It is precisely this experience that has left an indelible mark on the Communist Movement since, with Party-building becoming the final and in many ways most important item at all national congresses. Yet, this was not merely a Party concern, for the whole purpose of Party-building was for the Party—always a minority among any population—to gain the trust of the masses by being aware of people's needs and working out policies that addressed these needs.

The outcome of this initial effort at Party-building was that the Party was transformed from a collection of isolated and often demoralised groups of communists, at the time of the conclusion to the Counter Revolutionary (Civil) War, into genuine mass organisations that were woven into the many

layers of working life and thus society. New contradictions arose, particularly in light of the NEP, which generated simmering social tensions and worker disgruntlement at the "Nepman" and kulak, who became prominent during this time. It was precisely this dissatisfaction—manifested again and again at the Party's grassroots workplace meetings—that was leveraged by the "New Opposition" and "United Opposition" in their challenges to the Party over the NEP. In the "New Opposition" of 1925–1926, Zinoviev was able to draw on his significant Leningrad base, and the delegation of experienced hands sent to deal with the problem had to deploy tactics from the old Communist tool-box to win the PPOs back to the Central Committee's position. The whole experience made it clear that the Party's grassroots had become a crucial institutional space, but that they also needed much further education and training in the Party so as to be effective. This education was to raise the political astuteness of the many new rank-and-file members, so that they could participate actively in public affairs and strengthen the crucial links with the broader masses. By the time of the United Opposition of 1926–1927 (Zinoviev-Trotsky-Kamenev) the struggle was less intense, and the opposition gained relatively little traction in the PPOs in Leningrad, which were generally unimpressed and condemned their moves.

The maturation of the grassroots PPOs was revealed during the socialist offensive, from 1929, when Party activists began to anticipate rather than respond to policy directions. The massive effort at industrialisation and collectivisation of agriculture was a root-and-branch revolution in socio-economic life, leading to a complete transformation of the working class at the base of the Party. Now the PPOs became a vital mediating factor in the myriad social tensions produced by the breakneck speed of transformation. The workplace became "red" as never before, managerial staff were held accountable through penetrating critical assessment, and the rank-and-file became a vital source of critically constructive proposals for dealing with the many problems generated by such rapid transformation. Pugnacious was the political culture, and in the process the PPOs consolidated their role as stalwarts of Central Committee policies, becoming both more united and organisationally competent.

On top of all of this, we find the massive project of "cultural revolution" of the 1930s, which sought to raise the educational and cultural level of workers and the whole of society. Kokosalakis shows how the initially

ambitious plans met reality in the mid-1930s. Workers were indeed interested in educational and cultural improvement, but the hard factory work and existing Party duties meant that they engaged with issues that were immediately relevant. For example, a major concern was clean and efficient canteens in the workplace. The reason: during periods of food scarcity, the canteens were the only source of nutritious food for workers. Further, concomitant to the effort to recover and transform some traditional Russian cultural values we find that educational and cultural development took a more realistic approach, focusing on longer-term goals that would fit within already busy and exhausting work rosters. That said, by the second half of the 1930s considerable real progress had been made, ranging from regular home visits (dealing with a range of domestic, ethical, and political matters), through well-attended sessions on the deeper questions of Marxist theory, to picking up the lag in providing schools for children, up-graded dormitories, and the like.

The next phase concerns the campaign for electoral democracy of the later 1930s and its associated purge of 1937–1938. Since I have dealt with this material above (Sect. 5.3.1), there is no need to repeat that material here, save to point out that that PPOs were at the forefront in denouncing the “wreckers” and actually had to be restrained by the later months of 1938.

The mass repression of 1937–1938 was, as I have noted, the last time a violent purge of this scale was undertaken. In the period that followed—still under-studied—the Party was finally able to begin the move towards the stability of practical legitimacy. During this time, the discipline needed for a substantial shift so as to prepare for defending the Soviet Union against invasion and the well-established practices of consultative democracy were not seen in opposition to one another, but rather as complementary: “Although we have no reason to doubt the urgency with which the party leadership approached the task of putting industry on a war footing, it never seemed to think of party activism as being counterproductive to this goal” (Kokosalakis 2022, 241). At the same, there was a shift to stability in Party affairs and the country as a whole. New Party rules were widely debated and adopted at the Eighteenth Congress of 1939. Not only did they emphasise the role of inner-Party democracy as a supervisory mechanism (see Sect. 5.3.1), but they also stipulated that wholesale purges were of the past and that anti-corruption campaigns, reviews of personal conduct,

accountability checks, and whistle-blowing were to be institutionalised as regular Party practices. These practices had already been a reality in the grassroots PPOs, so the formalisation in the new Party rules functioned as a recognition of such practices. It was, in short, a signal not of retreat for the sake of preparation for war, but institutional maturation. By now, grassroots engagement was such an inescapable feature of Party life and Soviet power that they became the main conduits for policy and engagement. In other words, consultative democracy had at last become a core feature of socialist governance. War may have been looming, to which the Soviet Union gave its all in the defeat of fascism, but the reality of consultative democracy was here to stay.

### 7.3.3 Human Rights

It is perhaps less known than it should be that there was also some progress in developing what has become today the Marxist tradition of human rights (Boer 2021). A little background: while Marx and Engels were quite scathing of the bourgeois "rights of man," pointing out that they are inescapably connected with the bourgeois right to private property and the related right to inheritance (Marx and Engels 1846, 208, 361–363, 1848, 498, 504), we also find the beginnings of a distinctly different approach to human rights. It's pre-history can already be found in Hegel's "positive rights" or "material rights," manifested in terms of self-preservation, subsistence, freedom from want, work and life itself (Hegel 1986, 109; Losurdo 2004, 69, 89, 186). But it would fall to Engels to stipulate the core principle of a Marxist approach in an earlier work that fed into the Communist Manifesto:

> Question 17: What will be your first measure once you have established democracy?
>
> Answer: Guaranteeing the subsistence of the proletariat (Engels 1847, 102).

Over time, this key point would be articulated in terms of the proletarian movement's activism, revolution, and an ensuing socialist system that would focus on managing production and watching over the true interests of society (Engels 1873a, 86, 1873b, 425).

In light of this background, the next major step in developing a Marxist approach to human rights took place in the context of the Soviet Union's 1936 Constitution, in which multiple rights were clearly stipulated (Supreme Soviet 1936a, b). In his reflections on the Constitution, Stalin contrasts the situation in the Soviet Union with bourgeois or capitalist democracies. What is missing from the latter form of democracy and its constitutions, he argues, is an emphasis on freedom from economic exploitation: "there cannot be real equality between employer and workman, between landlord and peasant, if the former possess wealth and political weight in society while the latter are deprived of both—if the former are exploiters while the latter are exploited" (Stalin 1936c, 130, 1936d, 169). Similarly, in his interview with Roy Howard, Stalin observed: "It is difficult for me to imagine what 'personal liberty' is enjoyed by an unemployed person, who goes about hungry, and cannot find employment." Real liberty exists when there is no exploitation and oppression, when a person is "not haunted by the fear of being tomorrow deprived of work, of home and of bread" (Stalin 1936a, 110; 1936b, 143–144). This is precisely what socialism emphasises: freedom from economic exploitation, or socio-economic well-being.

Further, Stalin distinguishes between formal and proactive rights, or between abstract and exercised rights (Stalin 1936c, 130–131; 1936d, 169–170). Formal and abstract rights are found in bourgeois constitutions, which simply state the limited rights in question—civil and political freedoms—without stipulating the more basic question of the conditions, opportunities, and means for exercising these rights. The outcome is that the civil and political rights characteristic of bourgeois democracy appear in merely formal or abstract statements. By contrast, socialist rights are proactive and exercised, precisely because they are based on freedom from economic exploitation. With this foundation, the rights in question can be enacted and ensured.

The significance of the constitutional context for the development of Marxist human rights is that such rights began to be seen as an important component of socialist governance. In one respect, this emphasis was a reply to the formal and abstract rights of capitalist states, but the development of the Marxist tradition was due more to internal dynamics. As socialist governance began to mature, it became clear that the human

right to subsistence, to socio-economic well-being, indeed to common prosperity is a core right in the Marxist tradition.

### 7.3.4 Leadership of the Communist Party

A further contribution concerns the organic leadership of the Communist Party, moving beyond Lenin's initial formulations of a highly disciplined vanguard that would guide and include the vast majority on the road to socialism. To the question of the Party's leadership Stalin devoted considerable energy and developed a dialectic of "from below" and "from above," of the organic connection between the Party and the masses that was constantly on guard against separation or divorce.[7] The key text here is "The Foundations of Leninism," which concluded an immensely creative period that lay the groundwork for the future shape of Party building.[8] Stalin draws from and then develops Lenin's thought through six theses concerning the nature of the Communist Party, which is: (1) an advanced detachment of the working class; (2) an organised detachment; (3) the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat; (4) an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat; (5) the embodiment of the unity of will that is incompatible with factions; (6) strong precisely because it purges opportunist elements (Stalin 1924b, 169–186, 1924c, 175–193). Let me emphasise here that the Party is an advanced and organised "detachment" of the working class. Of course, this is framed in Lenin's terminology of the vanguard, but it also goes a step further. The Party, Stalin points out, is inescapably part of the working class, "closely bound up with it by all the fibres of its being," existing only through this "bond" and the "moral and political credit" granted by the masses. Stalin stresses that the Party is not an end to itself, not a self-sufficient force. By contrast, it is a "weapon" or "instrument [*orudie*] in the hands of the proletariat" (Stalin 1924b, 179–180, 1924c, 187). In this light, socialist democracy means the close and organic bond between the Party and the workers, peasants, and—from the 1930s—communist intellectuals. This emphasis places heavy demands on the Party, which must always ensure prestige, respect, and "moral capital [*moral'nyi kapital*]" among the non-Party masses (Stalin 1924a, 313, 1924d, 327). Without such a connection any "democracy" is worthless and the Party is doomed. In well-nigh Hegelian terms, the "Party is part of the class; it exists for the class, not for itself" (Stalin 1924e, 238, 1924f, 227).[9]

As we have seen, there was a distinctive feature of the Soviet Union that was not followed by countries such as China and the DPRK: a singular political party. While this reality enhanced the need for and reflections upon the leadership of the Communist Party, it arose from the context of often bitter factional struggles within the Party. The constantly changing groupings with ever-new names, from the time of Kamenev and Zinoviev to that of Trotsky, led—after much patience—to a firmer resolve to ensure Party unity and its singular leadership. The problem was by no means solved in the 1930s, as Khrushchev's disastrous condemnation of Stalin in the 1950s and Gorbachev's opportunist rise to leadership in the 1980s attest.

To sum up the contributions of the Soviet Union to the development of socialist democracy. First, we have seen that it did not live up to its plans and expectations for electoral democracy in the 1930s, although Stalin did identify the crucial categories of merit and competence for non-politicised elections, as well as the supervisory role that elections would exercise. The more significant contribution was through consultative democracy, manifested in the consistent and core role of PPOs from the earliest days of Soviet power. This would come to be a consistent feature of socialist governance, manifested in the "Chongsanri method" in the DPRK, and the many dimensions of consultative democracy as they have emerged from the "mass line" in China. The two other contributions to the developing tradition of socialist governance concerned the next steps in a Marxist approach to human rights, especially the core right to freedom from exploitation, and the inescapable leadership of the Communist Party.

Allow me to conclude this section with two two quotations. The first is from Stalin, who described the Soviet Union as the "most democratic of any country in the world" (Stalin 1937a, 239, 1937b, 307). And the second:

> When Stalin described the USSR as the most democratic country in the world, he was not only being honest, but also factually correct. This is because Stalin's concept of democracy was derived from the Marxist-Leninist ideological canon and therefore encompassed a variety of conditions not usually associated with the term in Western liberal thought, but present in the Soviet Union (Kokosalakis 2020, 91).

## 7.4 A “Socialist State”

We may now turn to the question of a socialist state, concerning which we face a contradiction: while the Soviet Union already began to experience what I have earlier called an “unexpected withering” of the state (Sect. 3.5), in which the lines between state and society became quite blurred, there was at the same time an increasing usage of the terminology of a “proletarian state” and a “socialist state.” At the very same time, the Communist Party, especially through its PPOs, was instrumental in rendering the typical Western distinction between state and society unhelpful for understanding the Soviet Union. This is in line with Engels’s emphasis on governance standing in the midst of society. How, then, do we reconcile this clear historical development with the increasing usage of “socialist state”? As we saw in the chapter on Engels, the definition of “the state”—as he had developed it—was as a separated public power, alienated from and standing over society. While too many Western observers have been misled by the assumption that the Soviet Union was a state of this sort, a question remains: how did they understand the terminology of a “socialist state”?

In the context of the relative economic and social stability at the end of the first Five-Year Plan, it was felt that the basic contours of a socialist system had been established. It had been a tumultuous process, as they felt their way forward for the first time in history, but the claim was not without its objective reality. Agriculture was now on a firm footing, and the vastly different landscape of an industrialised country was apparent to all. In light of these achievements and the sense that a socialist system was now secure, debates turned—as we have already seen—to matters of governance. I am interested here in the question of the state itself.[10]

### 7.4.1 Overcoming the Dialectic of Saturn

Two moments are significant, the first at a joint plenum of the Central Committee in 1933, and the second in a report to the Party’s Eighteenth Congress in 1939. The initial topic of debate in both contexts is—tellingly—the withering away of the state. The immediate context of the 1933 joint plenum was the conclusion of the first Five-Year Plan, with early claims that socialism had been founded in all aspects of the economy. One would expect that capitalist elements had been eradicated. But let us not be hasty, Stalin warns in his report, for the “moribund classes,” although defeated,

have resorted to worming their way into the new forms of industry, agriculture, trade, and even government in order to sabotage the new project. This situation led him to argue for the intensification of class conflict, and in this light he offers this comment on the state's withering:

> The abolition of classes is not achieved by the extinction of the class struggle, but by its intensification. The state will wither away, not as a result of weakening the state power, but as a result of strengthening it to the utmost, which is necessary for finally crushing the remnants of the dying classes and for organising defence against the capitalist encirclement that is far from having been done away with as yet, and will not soon be done away with (Stalin 1933a, 215, 1933b, 210–211).[11]

Stalin goes further, proposing that the state's strength is not merely the basis for its withering, but also that the growth of Soviet power intensifies "the resistance of the last remnants of the dying classes" (Stalin 1933a, 216, 1933b, 211–212).

What are we to make of this text? In an earlier work, I attempted to frame this intensification of the dialectic in a theological frame (not unfamiliar to Stalin as an erstwhile theological student) as the intensification of evil when goodness becomes more apparent (Boer 2017b, 97–101). This may have been helpful for thinking with and through Stalin on the question of a materialist doctrine of good and evil, but less so for the question of socialist governance. On that matter, I am now more persuaded by the argument of Domenico Losurdo (2008, 47–49), who speaks of the "dialectic of Saturn." With reference to the myth of Saturn consuming his children, Losurdo means that a Party that came to power through immense class conflict and proletarian revolution struggled mightily to put this history behind it. From time to time, the Party would once again be convulsed by immense struggles and not a little violence, framing the process in terms of the continuance, and even intensification, of class struggle. One is reminded here of Mao Zedong's putting aside, or even forgetting in the tumultuous decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the significant insights concerning the management of non-antagonistic contradictions among the people (Mao 1957a, 1957b), and promoting class struggle—in society and in the Party—as the primary contradiction. All of

this would lead to the disruptive and chaotic leftist deviation of the "Cultural Revolution."

### 7.4.2 A Second Stage of Socialism

While the Communist Party of China was able to overcome this "dialectic of Saturn" by the later 1970s, in the Soviet Union we can see the process emerging at the Party's Eighteenth Congress in 1939. Of course, the congress took place in the immediate aftermath of one of the more intense processes of internal struggle during the purge and trials of 1937–1938. Perhaps it was precisely this experience, now with war underway elsewhere in Europe, that provided the context for Stalin's most significant reflections on the state and socialist governance (Stalin 1939a, 330–336, 1939b, 411–422).

Relevant here are Stalin's deliberations—once again—on the state's withering. Now it was widely agreed that a socialism system had been established and that the exploiting classes had been smashed as a result of the socialist offensive and the purge of the last few years. Some argued: why not give the state a push, enabling it to wither and become an exhibit—as Engels had suggested—in the museum of antiquities? Stalin replied by returning to Engels's well-known text on the state's dying away, arguing that an abstract theoretical level Engels may have been correct in light of the circumstances in which he wrote. However, circumstances change and Marxists should reinterpret the question of the state's withering in light of the altered situation. The relevant circumstances in 1939 included the reality of specific internal developments in the country and the international situation. Thus, class opponents, Stalin argued, had been obliterated within the Soviet Union, with the implication that his argument from 1933 concerning the intensification of class conflict was no longer relevant in relation to internal matters. Therefore, the new socialist state may be able to withdraw from the internal situation, and wither away somewhat and focus on administering the economy for the sake of the true interests of society.

By contrast, the external situation had become dire. The long-anticipated conflict with international anti-communist forces was imminent. Enemies abounded, with capitalist encirclement, persistent interventions, and the ever-present threat of a fifth column. The class struggle may have finally been over internally, but the international class struggle, between socialist and capitalist camps, was as present as ever. In this situation, one

could hardly expect the complete dismantling and withering away of the socialist state. As van Ree (2002, 137) points out, Stalin "was realistic enough and not enough of a utopian to embark on a course of self-destruction."

In the next step of his argument, Stalin points out that the founders of Marxism could hardly have known what actual socialist construction would mean, particularly in terms of socialism in one country, and so their abstract formulations need to be reconsidered. Even Lenin's "The State and Revolution" was incomplete; a second volume remained unwritten due to the pressing concerns of the October Revolution. Lenin may have tentatively entitled this section, "the experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917," but Stalin felt that it was more appropriate to deal with the experience of socialist governance after October.

In doing so, Stalin identifies two phases or stages within socialism itself. Let us recall the context. Apart from the eruption of purges, trials, and violence, the 1930s had also been immensely creative: they were a decade of the socialist offensive, overcoming the backwardness of Soviet industry and the chronic famines that had periodically devastated Russia for centuries, of developing the preferential policies for minority nationalities (see Chap. 5), major breakthroughs for women in the workforce, the 1936 constitution, and the beginnings of active involvement in anti-colonial struggles.

What bearing do these events have on the theory of the stages of socialist governance? In the first stage, the socialist state functioned as Lenin had stipulated, a proletarian dictatorship that dealt with class enemies internally and externally, predicated on the interests of the labouring majority. This majority had seized control of the state apparatus and wielded it to crush the former oppressors. At the same time, the need for economic reconstruction was urgent, trying to get the country back on its feet, and there was an equally pressing need for cultural development and education in the new realities of a socialist system.

It is only in the second stage that a distinctly socialist state begins to come to light. The full nature of this relatively mature socialist state must be drawn from various writings by Stalin, especially since he provides only the briefest of suggestions in the report to the Eighteenth Congress (Stalin 1939a, 335–336, 1939b, 420–421). The main features may be identified as follow:

1. The elimination of the last remnants of capitalist elements, and the established reality of a socialist economic system (as a result of the socialist offensive).
2. Socialist democracy, in terms of an unrealised electoral democracy and the realisation of what would become a paradigmatic approach to consultative democracy through active grassroots engagement.
3. The need to promote a distinctly Marxist approach to human rights, which is both proactive and based on the fundamental right of freedom from exploitation.
4. The inescapable reality of leadership by the Communist Party, although the Communist Party of the Soviet Union tended to emphasise the organic links with the working masses rather than the indirect leadership of the Party through rule-of-law statutory processes (as we find in China).
5. The "withering away" of internal class struggle and its replacement by non-antagonistic class relations, with a simultaneous awareness that class struggle had been internationalised. A new socialist state would require extra vigilance to ensure that global counter-revolutionary forces would not put an end to its efforts of socialist construction. In his interview with Emil Ludwig, Stalin observes that the new state is not a "national" state but an "international" state, which strengthens the international working class (Stalin 1931a, 105, 1931d, 107).
6. A focus on administering the stuff of life and the economy for the true interests of society—so Engels—which is manifested in the fact that "socialism does not mean poverty and privation, but the abolition of poverty and privation; it means the organisation of a prosperous and cultured life for all members of society" (Stalin 1934a, 357–358, 1934b, 365). The same can be said for the concerns with education, literacy, medical care, welfare, and so on.
7. The need for a "fully-formed multi-national Socialist state" (Stalin 1936c, 126, 1936d, 163), in the sense that minority nationalities are the focus of preferential policies that seek to enhance unity (see Chap. 5). This experience provided the initial framework—theoretically and

practically—for supporting anti-colonial struggles for national liberation in many parts of the world.

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## 7.5 Conclusion: A Socialist State and Its Withering Away

In the conclusion, I would like to address a contradiction mentioned on a few occasions above: the increasing usage of "socialist state" and the historical reality of the relative withering away of the distinction between state and society. Let us begin with Stalin, who observed in his all-important report to the Party's Eighteenth Congress: "We now have an entirely new, Socialist state [*sotsialisticheskoe gosudarstvo*], without precedent in history" (Stalin 1939a, 336, 1939b, 421–422). Some observers have pointed out that the standard Western distinction between state and society is rather unhelpful for understanding the Soviet Union. Various reasons have been proposed, such as the chaotic transformations that led to the state shading "almost imperceptibly into a dynamic, mobile, dramatically changing society" (Getty 1987, 394), or the role of myriad Party organisations, from the Central Committee through to PPOs, that began to blur the boundaries between state and society (Kokosalakis 2021, 355, 2022).[12]

In this light, let us return to the quotation from Stalin, which has two main points: a socialist state; a state that is entirely new and without precedent. To begin with the terminology of "state." I have emphasised on a number of occasions that Engels reserved the term "state" for a separated public power that is alienated from society. In light of this definition, he could not use the word "state" for the forms of governance under socialism, which would stand in the midst of society. Socialism entailed an enmeshed governance, a "public power" that is not separated from society. At a practical level, the Soviet Union was beginning to manifest precisely this feature of what I have preferred to call "socialist governance." The conclusion: strictly speaking the claim to a "socialist state" jars with Engels's thoughts on the matter.

Now let us focus on the claim that it was entirely new and without precedent. This is a qualitative claim, in the sense that the Soviet Union was fundamentally different from any form of the state that had appeared hitherto in human history. In this light, Stalin's claim is much more

ambitious. Instead of dispensing with the terminology of the state, he seeks to redefine the term itself. It may be argued here that the Russian word *gosudarstvo* contains within its semantic field the senses of state, governance, commonwealth, country, and realm. So one could say that Stalin was speaking more of socialist governance than a socialist state. I am not sure that this will get us very far, for the key lies with the bold qualitative claim, which may be put in these terms: if the qualitatively distinct socialist state entails that a public power stands in the midst of society, that it is enmeshed with society to extent that it is no longer possible to distinguish state and society, then the terminology of "state" is completely redefined. If so, this constitutes a significant advance beyond Engels, but it was an advance made in light of historical experience.

What, then, are we to make of the debates of the 1930s concerning the state's "withering away" and indeed Stalin's need to reply to them? In many respects, the debates were framed in terms of the more conventional idea of the "dying away" or "withering away" of the state. This is understandable, since Engels had argued influentially that such a process would be one of the last results of socialist construction, and Lenin had suggested that it would begin to happen in an as-yet unspecified future time when communism itself has been established on a global scale. "How soon," Lenin observes, "we do not and *cannot* know." So protracted is the process that one cannot specify the time, "because there is *no* material for answering these questions" (Lenin 1917d, 96, 1917h, 474).[13] On many occasions, Stalin too would come to emphasise this delay. Before such a withering is possible, communism is needed. This means highly developed productive forces, common prosperity, the complete vanquishing of bourgeois imperialism, and the global dominance of socialist countries—quite a list already. Given the reality that socialism and capitalism will coexist and struggle for a long time to come, even the global dominance of socialism would take place in "a remote and possible future," and clearly not in the foreseeable future (Stalin 1924b, 117–118, 1924c, 121). As for communism, it would have to become "part and parcel of the life of the peoples" before the state could begin its process of withering away (Stalin 1929a, 349, 1929b, 364).[14]

In many respects, they were too fixated on the conventional understanding of the dying away of the state, and so missed the reality unfolding all around them. The state as a separated public power was

already withering away, and was increasingly standing in the midst of society. To be sure, the process was not entirely bloodless, but a revolution is not a dinner party. Or did they really miss it? In an editorial in the leading magazine *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, in the first issue of 1935, the author observed—with an eye on Engels's works—that the Soviet state was not "separated by any barrier from the broad masses of the people." Why? It "does not stand above the masses, but merges with them" (Editorial 1935, 15).[15] The understanding of how such a standing in the midst of society, and thus a withering away of the state, was taking place may not have been entirely the same as I have proposed here, but the point is worth noting.

Once more, Stalin's observation concerning an entirely new socialist state: if such a socialist state is one that has begun the process of ceasing to be a separated public public power, and if it stands in the midst of society, then it is qualitatively distinct from any form of the state seen before in human history. To push the dialectical contradiction: a socialist state is precisely the form of the state that emerges when the state as it had thus far been known begins to wither away.

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# Footnotes

1 Those familiar with the interminable and futile debates among Western Marxists may be thinking of the charge levelled at Stalin concerning the "dictatorship of the Party." This was actually a topic of considerable debate within the Communist Party in the second half of the 1920s, with the constantly changing factional groupings charging the Central Committee with such a dictatorship. It is worth noting—for those not familiar with the material—that Stalin went to great lengths to explain that the dictatorship of proletariat entailed the close bond between Party and proletariat and peasantry, and that the strength of the bond determined the strength of the dictatorship (Stalin 1924b, 26–28, 1924c, 27–30, 1926c, 225, 1926d, 236–237). And he was even more painstaking in his efforts to refute the charge concerning dictatorship by the Party (Stalin 1924b, 31–60, 1924c, 33–64, 1926f, 47, 78–80, 1926e, 49, 82–84).

2 Similarly, the proletarian dictatorship is the foundation for equality between and the rights of minority nationalities (Stalin 1921a, 19, 1921b, 20, 1923a, 169–170, 1923b, 262–263). We have seen in the previous chapter how it was proposed that Soviet power was the only way to "solve the national question" (Stalin 1921c, 37, 1921d, 38), so there is no need to elaborate here further.

3 Note also: “Our state is the organisation of the proletarian class as the state power” (Stalin 1927a, 184, 1927b, 181).

4 The following draws primarily on Zhukov (2003) and Kokosalakis (2020). One may also consult Lomb’s (2018) study, which draws on archival material from the Kirov region and the extensive participation of collective farmers in the massive country-wide discussions over the draft constitution.

5 As Kokosalakis (2020, 85) observes, there was relatively little debate concerning article 126, which specified for the first time that the “most active and politically most conscious citizens in the ranks of the working class and other sections of the working people unite in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks),” which functions as the vanguard of all workers who seek to “strengthen and develop the socialist system” and as the “leading core” of all workers’ organisations (Supreme Soviet 1936a, article 126, 1936b, stat’ia 126).

6 A somewhat different study, focused on rural engagement with consultative democracy (my term) but not in the frame of Communist Party grassroots, may be found in Lomb (2018).

7 This relation should not be seen in terms of a typically Western either-or, but rather as the both-and of dialectical engagement. As Lenin already observed in 1917, “it was necessary to begin simultaneously from above and from below” (Lenin 1917b, 147–148; 1917f, 365), and as Stalin put it in relation to the socialist offensive of the 1930s, the “distinguishing feature of this revolution is that it was accomplished from above [*sverhu vniz*] … and directly supported from below [*snizu vverh*]” (Stalin 1938a, 305, 1938b, 300).

8 See the first chapter of Kokosalakis (2022) for an insightful account of the process that began with the resolution, “On the Question of Party Building”, at the Tenth Congress of February 1921 and concluded with Stalin’s lectures.

9 Many are the formulations of this bond between the Party and the masses, with Stalin often deploying poetic and literary images. These include Antaeus, the ancient Greek god who was the child of Poseidon and Gaea, and who was invincible as long as he stayed in close touch with the earth that had suckled and reared him. Antaeus was defeated only when Hercules suspended him and prevented him from touching the earth (Stalin 1937c, 291–292, 1937d, 184–185). We also find metaphors such as the “feelers” that convey the will of workers to the Party, the “spiritual threads” and “transmission belts”—such as PPOs, trade unions, cooperatives, youth leagues, women, schools, the press, and the army—that connect the Party with the masses. I deal with this material in an earlier work (Boer 2017b, 126–133).

10 The material that follows is a substantial revision of some earlier material (Boer 2017a).

11 A year later, at the Party's Seventeenth Congress, Stalin summarises these points (Stalin 1934a, 350–351, 1934b, 357–358).

12 Apophatically, it is easier to say what it was not: a federation, nation-state, empire, or colonising power (Suny 1993, 85; Weeks 2005, 567).

13 Emphasis in original.

14 As one may expect, such arguments have been misrepresented by some as opportunistic, as finding of excuses to maintain the power of the Communist Party in what was a conventional state riven with class conflict (Aspaturian 1954; Balibar 1977, 49–55; Resnick and Wolff 2002).

15 Many thanks to Yiannis Kokosalakis for drawing my attention to this article.

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# 7. The "Korean Style" of Socialist Governance in the DPRK

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## 7.1 Opening Remarks

The history of socialist governance now moves eastward, in terms of the Eurasian landmass. The move is not so great, across the border from the Soviet Union to Korea. After all, the Soviet Union was, like Russia today, a Eurasian country with its own distinct civilisational development. However, when we come to east Asia—the focus of the remainder of the book—we find the most enduring types of socialist governance. It would be another task to assess the cultural, social, and historical reasons why Marxism took such deep root in eastern Asia in a way not found elsewhere in the world. The fact that Marxism did resonate so deeply in east Asia explains—in part at least—why socialism continues to grow in strength, albeit not without periodic challenges and problems, in countries such as the DPRK, Laos, Vietnam, and China.

The concern of this chapter is the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), informally known as North Korea. In what follows, I will devote most attention to the practices of socialist governance in the DPRK. This requires a treatment of electoral and consultative democracy, as well as the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea—familiar categories by now. The continuities with other socialist countries is notable, but there are also distinct emphases in light of the DPRK's concrete conditions. In terms of

electoral democracy: while there is only one decision-making body, the Supreme People's Assembly (along with regional people's assemblies), there is also the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland. This is not a governing body per se, but it plays a crucial role in the electoral process. Made up of all political parties, mass organisations, and religious groups, it proposes multiple candidates, debates their suitability, and approves one candidate for elections. In terms of consultative democracy (apart from the Democratic Front), we find a comparable role for what the Soviet Union called Primary Political Organisations. These are found in the Chongsanri method in agriculture and the Taean work system in industry, where party cells and local committees engage substantively and robustly with collective farmers and factory workers in the process of making decisions and plans. As for the leadership of the Communist Party, which became the Workers' Party of Korea in 1946, this is a given, but the statutory processes by which it exercises leadership can be seen most clearly in the unique role of the State Affairs Commission. It is this body that the country's leader now chairs, although he is chair of neither the SPA nor president of its Standing Committee. I will also devote some attention to the DPRK's political philosophy, which reflects the anti-hegemonic emphasis on self-sufficiency and the need for development in light of the DPRK's specific characteristics. While *Juche* (people as masters of their destiny) and *Songun* (military-first) are reasonably well-known, I give greater attention to the people-first approach of *Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism*. Identified and promoted by Kim Jong Un, primacy is given to—as far as possible in light of circumstances—to the comprehensive improvement of the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the common people.

A crucial question concerns the sources. In some earlier work, I waded through all of the available Western material on the DPRK. With rare exceptions, this material can hardly be called "scholarship." Caricatures, fabrications, falsities, Orientalism, racism, the "Potemkin" assumption, and more, mean that any rigorous scholarly work on the DPRK must put such material to one side. That said, there are a small number of exceptions among Western scholars, based on research visits and archival materials, and I will use them where needed in this chapter. However, my prime source is Korean scholarship itself. Fortunately, it is now possible to access a reasonable amount of Korean scholarship in multiple languages on the

Naenara website, or—if one prefers—to purchase them from Korea Books. Since I do not read the Korean Hangul script, I am reliant on well-produced English translations. Still, those whose minds are saturated with Western liberal assumptions will need to make an extra effort to overcome an ingrained assumption and even prejudice: Korean scholarship does not simply parrot the Party line. In other words, it is a distinct scholarly discourse that seeks to explain in detail a country that remains much misunderstood and misrepresented.

Finally, we should be very clear that the Korean revolution was one that established deep roots among the people; it was not imposed from outside or from above.[1] A major factor is that among all east Asian countries, Korea has—perhaps along with Vietnam—arguably suffered most from imperialism and colonialism. Japan's process of capitalist modernisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century used the standard capitalist approach: colonise another country (Korea), brutally suppress any resistance, and exploit its resources and labour power for one's own benefit. At the moment Japan was defeated by the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance—to which Japan devoted 75% of its war effort[2]—the United States turned up as a second wave of colonialism. Here we find one of Stalin's two mistakes towards the close of the Second World War: he ordered the Soviet Red Army to pause at the 38th Parallel, when it could have taken over the whole of the peninsula with little resistance (the other mistake was to concede significant parts of the Germany to US and UK forces). Meanwhile, the anti-communist Japanese smoothly made the transition to assisting US occupation of the southern half of the peninsula (Brun and Hersch 1976, 75–76). The Koreans north of the 38th Parallel not unjustifiably refer to the south as a "US puppet regime," as a colonised country with tens of thousands of foreign soldiers on its soil. That the US was subsequently guilty of extensive war crimes—napalm, biological weapons, genocidal efforts to obliterate the country and its people—in the war of 1950–1953[3] only adds to the strong emphasis on anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic sovereignty in Korea. Like Vietnam, Korea's keen attention to Marxism's concern with anti-colonial struggles for national liberation determines so much of the approach in the north (Kim Il Sung 1970). In short, "independence, Songun, and socialism" are not simply the necessities of the Korean revolution, but also the realities that accord with its concrete conditions (Kim Jong Un 2015c, 35).

## 7.2 Historical Background

The components of the system of governance did not, of course, emerge overnight; they are the product of a long process of development and maturation. As with China, there had been a long and bitter revolutionary struggle before the DPRK was established.[4] This experience led to the formation of a revolutionary people's government that was based for a time in the area around the Tuman River and sought to coordinate the mobile and ever-changing realities of the struggle.[5] It was this experience that led to the proposal to establish a Korea-wide democratic people's republic. Thwarted these plans were in light of post-liberation realities, so power was initially held by a provisional people's committee. Not one committee, but many: by November of 1945 people's committees—11,500 of them—had been formed in all areas, "from provinces to cities, counties, sub-counties and ri" (Choe and Pak 2018, 7; Brun and Hersch 1976, 129–130).[6] These many people's committees required coordination through ten administrative bureaus that sought to ensure the inter-connection between economic, political, and social policies.

All of this was preliminary, leading up to a consultative conference in February of 1946. Crucially, the conference included representatives from all political parties that had striven for Korean independence, along with mass and social organisations, and the many people's committees. This multi-party consultative approach would abide in Korea (see below), as it did in China. The conference set in place the basic realities of Korean governance, appointing a Provisional People's Committee, of which Kim Il Sung was elected chair. The task was twofold, embodied in the term democratic dictatorship: complete elimination of the remnant landlord class, comprador capitalists, pro-Japanese elements, and anti-communists (not a few escaped to the southern dictatorship under Syngman Rhee); develop socialist democracy among the ordinary people, namely, urban and rural workers. Obviously, the first part was a thorough exercise of what Marx and Engels designated as the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was certainly not bloodless, but one wonders whether any other type of transmission was possible in light of the former Japanese colonial system.

The Provisional People's Committee was—as the term indicates—clearly provisional. Soon enough, the next step was underway, with countrywide elections held on 3 November, 1946—the first in Korea's

history (Kim Il Sung 1946). The results of the elections led to an initial congress of delegates from all of the people's committees, and it was this congress that formally established the People's Assembly as the supreme organ of governance. The People's Assembly met for the first time on 21 February, 1947, and instituted the following measures: the establishment of a People's Committee to carry on the tasks of the Assembly when not in session; election of Kim Il Sung as chair of the People's Committee; and the organisation of elections at the lower levels, in districts, neighbourhoods, and villages, with the result that people's assemblies were established at these levels as well. The final transition of power took place at the first session of the new Supreme People's Assembly in September, 1948, when the People's Committee absolved itself (Kim Il Sung 1948).

Although there would be subsequent development of the governance structures, the basic system was now in place.[7] Notably, the early process was not so much an abolition of previous united-front structures and their replacement with new and more socialist structures—as happened in the Soviet Union. As Choe Su Nam and Pak Kum Il observe, "it was unnecessary to do away with the already established government to replace it with a socialist government." Instead, a "socialist government was established while preserving intact the form of the people's government" based on the worker-peasant alliance. At a more philosophical level, we can see this process in dialectical terms, in which former structures are preserved and transformed within the new framework. As a result, the DPRK embodies both multi-party and multi-organisational involvement through the Democratic Front and the socialist governmental forms of the People's Assemblies and the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

In light of this historical background, we may turn to the components of the DPRK's approach to socialist governance.

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## 7.3 Electoral Democracy

The DPRK's electoral democracy relates primarily to the people's assemblies, along with local state organs, assemblies, and committees. Every eligible citizen may stand for election, so much so that independent candidates are regularly elected to the people's assemblies and may even be elected to be the speaker or chair. The history of the DPRK has many such examples. I think here of Ryu Mi Yong (1921–2016), who moved from

south to north in 1986 so as to take up her role as chair of the Chondoist Chongu Party (The Party of the Young Friends of the Heavenly Way, formed in 1946). She was elected to the Supreme People's Assembly and became a member of the Standing Committee (then called the Presidium). Other examples include Gang Ryang Uk, a Presbyterian minister who was a leader of the Korean Christian Federation (a Protestant organisation) and served as vice president of the DPRK from 1972 until his death in 1982, as well as Kim Chang Jun, who was an ordained Methodist minister and became vice-chair of the Supreme People's Assembly (Ryu 2006, 673). Both Gang and Kim were buried at the Patriots' Cemetery.

### 7.3.1 The Electoral System

How do elections to all of the various bodies of governance work? Elections are universal and use secret ballots, and are—notably—direct. To my knowledge, the DPRK is the only socialist country that has implemented direct elections at all levels. Neither the Soviet Union (in its time) nor China have embraced a complete system of direct elections, preferring—and here I speak of China—to have direct elections at the lower levels of the people's congresses, and indirect elections to the higher levels.

As for candidates, it may initially seem as though the DPRK follows the Soviet Union's approach in having a single candidate for each elected position. This is indeed the case for the final process of voting, but there is also a distinct difference: candidates are selected through a robust process in the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland. As mentioned earlier, the struggle against Japanese imperialism and liberation of the whole peninsula drew together many organisations, and it is these that came to form the later Democratic Front. The Front was formed on 25 July, 1949 (Kim Il Sung 1949), and today includes the three political parties, and a range of mass organisations from the unions, youth, women, children, agricultural workers, journalism, literature and arts, and Koreans in Japan (*Chongryon*). Notably, it also includes representation from the Korean Christian Federation (Protestant), Korean Catholic Federation, and the Korean Buddhist Federation. All of these mass organisations make up the Democratic Front, and it is this organisation that proposes candidates. In many respects, this is where the multi-candidate dimension of elections comes to the fore. Here candidates are nominated for consideration from all of the mass organisations represented. Their suitability and merit for the

potential nomination is debated and discussed at many mass meetings, and only then is the final candidate nominated for elections to the SPA. Now we can see why candidates from the Chondoist movement, as well as from the Christian churches, have been and can be elected to the SPA and indeed the local assemblies.

To sum up the electoral process, we may see it in terms of a dialectical both-and: multi-candidate elections take place in the Democratic Front, which engages in extensive consideration of suitable candidates; single candidate elections take place for the people's assemblies. It goes without saying that in a non-antagonistic system of class and group interaction, the criterion for election is merit and political suitability

### 7.3.2 People's Assemblies

As for the bodies of governance, there is a similar continuity and discontinuity compared with other socialist countries. Unlike the Soviet Union, there is a unicameral Supreme People's Assembly, which is the highest authority in terms of laws, regulations, the constitution, and all leadership roles. The SPA is also responsible for the national economic plan, the country's budget, and foreign policy directions (Han 2016, 47–48). At the same time, the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland has an analogous function to a second organ of governance. This is a uniquely Korean approach to the question of a second organ of governance. While not an organ of governance as such, it plays a direct role in electoral democracy (see above), as well as the all-important manifestation of consultative democracy (see below). A further reason for this unique role of the Democratic Front may be adduced: while the Soviet Union and China see the second body or organ as representative of all minority nationalities and relevant groups, the absence of minority nationalities in a much smaller Korea means that such a form of representation is not needed.

Further details: the term for a representative elected to the SPA is five years, and representatives are drawn from workers, farmers, intellectuals, and service personnel. Even more, a representative cannot be arrested or subjected to criminal punishment without the consent of the SPA or its Standing Committee. How often does the SPA meet? It meets each year in March or April, but may also have extraordinary sessions, which can be called either by the Standing Committee or one-third of the representatives.

A session of the SPA requires a minimum quorum of two-thirds of the number of deputies, and the agenda of each session is extraordinarily full. A speaker and deputy speaker are appointed, a credentials committee examines the credentials of all delegates, and items for the agenda can be proposed by a delegate and by a number of administrative bodies, such as the State Affairs Commission, the Standing Committee of of the SPA, the Cabinet of the SPA, and its committees. As with all such supreme assemblies in socialist countries, the SPA also has the task of amending the constitution from time to time (Han 2016, 49–50). Notably, the chairperson (or speaker), and indeed president of the Standing Committee (see below), are distinct from the role of the country's president.

When the SPA is not in session, its duties are undertaken by the Standing Committee, which is appointed by the SPA.[8] It follows that the Standing Committee is the highest organ of governance between the sessions of the SPA. Normal meetings involve the permanent members of the committee, but it may also call plenary meetings when needed. Apart from undertaking the tasks of the SPA, the Standing Committee is also responsible for the functioning of the SPA itself: convening sessions, overseeing elections, and ensuring that decisions made at sessions of the SPA are enacted at local government levels.

The regional structure of governance is similar to the country-wide structure, with elected people's assemblies and the people's committee when the assembly is not in session (Han 2016, 55–59). These are found in every province, city, city district, and municipality, with terms of four years for elected representatives. Both bodies deal primarily with local concerns, implementing economic policies in light of conditions, budgets, educational and medical matters, the operation of the local judiciaries and public order, the functioning of cooperatives and organisations, and ensure the rights of citizens. While they must carry out plans and decisions from higher bodies, they also provide vital information and feedback to the higher bodies.

### 7.3.3 Political Parties

Other organs of governance also function, such as the cabinet, various ministries and commissions, and judicial organs, although I will not elaborate on these (Han 2016, 59–69). I do, however, need to address a final question concerning political parties. In contrast to the Soviet Union, the DPRK has a number political parties, all of which are represented in the

elected people's assemblies. Apart from the WPK, there are also the Korean Social-Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party, which is based on the indigenous religion of Chondoism (Han 2016, 36–39). The former is a successor to the Democratic Party of Korea, which was established on 3 November, 1945, on the basis of Korean independence and the need for the people of Korea to determine their own future. Comprised of democrats, anti-colonial nationalists, and religious personnel, this party distinguished itself in promoting the anti-colonial struggle—especially in the war of 1950–1953—and a desire for social justice across society. It was instrumental in making international connections so as to assist the DPRK in rebuilding after the war, and it maintains these connections. The party is particularly instrumental in promoting Korean reunification through its connections with the southern half of the peninsula. Needless to say, the party is committed to Korea's socialist project, with candidates elected to the people's assemblies and the provision of robust consultative input to government plans and policies.

The Chondoist Chongu Party is a notable example of a party organised on the basis of an indigenous Korean religion—and it goes without saying that it also shows a distinctly Korean approach to freedom of religion. The party was officially established in February of 1946, during a crucial but brief period when it seemed as though the whole of Korea had an opportunity to determine its own future, but the roots of Chondoism go back to the early nineteenth century and the teachings of Choe Je U, or Su Un (1824–1864).[9] Executed by the landlord class, Choe's teachings were carried on by successors, drawing upon and reinterpreting traditional Korean symbols, organising and publishing scriptures that were written in the popular Kasa poetry style, and a distinct worship practice involving pure water.[10] Arguing that the divine could be lived out on earth, the movement gave the most oppressed and downtrodden peasants of Korean society a sense of their own worth. The moment when Chondoism gained its revolutionary credentials was its involvement in the peasant or Tonghak Revolution (the initial name for the movement was Tonghak, or "Eastern learning"). In the north, this involvement in the revolution means that the socio-religious movement of Chondoism is seen as in some ways a precursor to the communist movement (Lee 1996, 105–128). It helps, of course, that Kim Il Sung has written favourably of Chondoism. To explain:

a core Chondoist principle is “humans are God [*in nae chon*]” (Beirne 2009, 158).[11] In his memoirs, Kim Il Sung observes:

> Of course there is something I believe in like God: the people. I have been worshipping the people as Heaven, and respecting them as if they were God. My God is none other than the people. Only the popular masses are omniscient and omnipotent and almighty on earth. Therefore, my life-time motto is “The people are my God” (Kim Il Sung 1994, V, 326).

It should come as no surprise at all that the religion itself is popular in the DPRK, with about three million members and 800 places of worship. Nor should it be surprising that it is represented by a political party, which has delegates elected to the people’s assemblies and saw the religion’s leader—Ryu Mi Yong (see above)—take significant leadership positions in the SPA.

As a way of summing up this section, let me first observe that every citizen of the DPRK is a member of a political party or one of the many social organisations. But some may still be tempted to ask: what is the purpose of these structures of electoral democracy, all the way from the Democratic Front’s role in nominating and selecting candidates, the three political parties, the people’s assemblies, and their standing committees? Too often have they been dismissed by the misinformed and malicious as “rubber stamps.” If so, it would be a complex and expensive stamp. The full answer to this question requires consideration of further features of the DPRK’s governance, suffice to point out here that they take the whole electoral process very seriously indeed. It is, after all, a key feature of socialist governance.

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## 7.4 Consultative Democracy

As we have already seen with regard to the Soviet Union, from the earliest days consultative democracy was a constituent feature of socialist approaches to democracy. The DPRK has taken consultative democracy much further, specifically with the Chongsanri method in agriculture, and the Taean method in industry. This section is primarily devoted to these two features, but first I need to address the question of the mass line.

### 7.4.1 The Mass Line

The mass line's institutional presence is most obviously with the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, with its 24 mass organisations and its vital role in the electoral process itself. Indeed, the distinction between electoral and consultative democracy risks seeing them as entirely discrete projects; by contrast, they influence one another in a process of dialectical mutual reinforcement. Obviously, this is a more robust form of democracy than that found in capitalist democracies.

However, the mass line goes much deeper, being integral to the structure of revolutionary struggle and socialist construction. Again and again, one finds an emphasis on the mass line, by which is meant that Party members can "serve the revolution only when they become faithful servants of the masses," since the revolution itself seeks both the "good of the masses" and can be accomplished "only by relying on the strength of the masses" (Kim Il Sung 1960b, 115).[12] The bond is two-way: collective leadership entails mingling with the masses, living with them, and listening to their opinions, so as to bring forth "new and bright ideas" (Kim Byong Sik 1970, 117).

> Dynamic and creative knowledge is always found among the masses. Of course, fragmentary and immature as the opinions of the masses may be at first, it is the duty of Party workers to grasp them in good time, and supplement and systematise them through collective consultations. The Party's leading bodies should then disseminate among the masses the opinions thus summarised and systematised, and lead the masses to follow them (Kim Il Sung 1960b, 133–134).

### 7.4.2 Chongsanri Method in Agriculture

As a concrete embodiment of the mass line, the Chongsanri method is named after a rural commune in the central part of the country, in Kangso County of South Phyongan Province. Why the place name? In 1960, a comprehensive rural inspection tour, led by Kim Il Sung, visited the collective. The outcomes of the visit led to a substantial revision of approaches in the countryside. The method developed entailed both robust input from rural Party members and indeed non-Party farmers and thorough implementation of policies developed by the central Party organs.[13]

Obviously, the two are closely related, in what may be called a simultaneous “bottom-up” and “top-down” approach. Effective policies, along with their implementation and assessment, cannot hope for success without substantive input from those who know what the actual situation is from everyday experience; the implementation of policies, and their adaptation, cannot happen if farmers do not “own” them and see them as appropriate for their local conditions. As Kim Il Sung put it at the WPK’s twentieth anniversary, the essence of the approach is that the “higher body helps the lower” so as to have a profound understanding of “actual conditions and find correct solutions to problems,” while simultaneously enlisting the “conscious enthusiasm and initiative of the masses so as to ensure the fulfilment of revolutionary tasks.” It is not only a “powerful method of work” for carrying out tasks successfully and substantially, but also an essential educational method for “raising the ideological and political level and practical capacity of officials and for revolutionising the masses” (Kim Il Sung 1965b, 439–440).[14] Of course, the whole approach requires competent and informed higher bodies and supervisors, along with educated common people so that they can engage productively and substantively. Ensuring both would require significant further practice, corrections in light of shortcomings, and yet further experience. Notably, much of the material from the time focuses less on grand and abstract statements and more on the specific measures needed to make the method work. Improving work styles, training, education, experience, detailed plans down to small work groups and individuals, realistic mechanisation, and the everyday realities of pig breeding, cotton growing, and compost—these and more are the constant themes elaborated in great detail.

To step back and provide some background: the precursor to the Chongsanri method is found in the initial dual strategy in the anti-colonial struggle: throwing off the Japanese yoke and abolishing feudal relations in the countryside through land reform, which was itself seen as a crucial feature of democratisation through the rural peasant committees. “After liberation,” observed Kim Il Sung, “the solution of the land problem in the countryside was our most urgent revolutionary task,” since feudal relations of landownership shackled peasants to exploitation and feudal slavery, and limited the productive forces and the potential for social progress (Kim Il Sung 1959, 10). The first step, then, was to redistribute land, which took place in a few weeks in 1946 and entailed moving 76% of the land from

landlords to peasants (Brun and Hersch 1976, 133). However, this redistribution was still based on a modified form of land ownership. The second step required a move to cooperatives, which was seen as a transition from individual ownership to more social forms. The third step, in the 1950 and 1960s, was to diminish the gaps between city and country, and between industry and farming, which would eventually pave the way for "all people's ownership" through complete collectivisation. No strict timelines were set, since each stage would become possible only after considerable experience and education among farmers and cadres on the ground (Brun and Hersch 1976, 199). The Chongsanri method is seen as a way to provide a robust framework for the realisation of people's ownership.

A key to the Chongsanri method is the role of primary Party organisations and the *ri* Party organisations, with their direct connections to the county branches (Kim Il Sung 1960b, 109).[15] Already from 1946, large numbers of active peasants joined the Workers Party, so that each village had its own branch. This development enabled a highly integrated and enmeshed structure of the Party within society, providing comprehensive input to policy-making, and ensuring the mechanisms for subsequent transitions (Brun and Hersch 1976, 336). The approach is comparable to the Soviet practices of Primary Party Organisations (see Sect. 3.3.3), with a crucial difference: whereas the Soviet approach focused on industrial workers, with relative weakness in the countryside, the Korean approach began with the reality that rural production was vital and indeed primary at the early stages of economic and political development. In other words, the *ri* Party organisations sought to ensure that the farming population was involved from the very beginning (Kim Byong Sik 1970, 115–116).

The success of the method depended on the dialectical unity of opposites: substantial and critically constructive input from the grass roots and rigorous implementation of the decisions and plans arising from this input. The relation between the two is not—as those with Western proclivities assume—in terms of either-or, but rather an Eastern Marxist emphasis on both-and, inspired by the Confucian tradition. To explain: the initial emphasis was to ensure that consultations and meetings were not conducted in a perfunctory and formalistic manner, with the Party committees simply implementing policies from the higher levels. Instead, it required "intensive, substantial, and well-organised" meetings, focused on "constructive suggestions of the Party members" so as to "bring into play

their conscious enthusiasm." Criticism of local leaders was to be the norm, so as boldly to bring "all defects to light" (Kim Il Sung 1960b, 111–112; see also Kim Byong Sik 1970, 113). Regular criticism of defects in work is like "washing our faces every morning," and if faces are not washed everyday, they "will become crusted with dirt, covered with rashes and, in the end, will be utterly spoilt and disfigured." Thus, "we should always wash out the defects from our work" (Kim Il Sung 1960a, 50). Active, open, and robust meetings were to become the necessary requirements for the method to work. Indeed, the tone of the many meetings at Chongsanri was one of intensive criticism of all levels of work, including that of the inspection team.

Did this approach lead to tensions with the higher organs—especially at a county level—in implementing decisions and plans? Only if the Party committees and leaders were incompetent—a topic of considerable criticism. With competent leaders, the unity of opposites comes into play: the more robust the consultation and input, the more rigorous would be the implementation of the final decision. The final decision—proposed by the county Party committee and then approved by the county people's assembly—would become law: "All particulars of the local plan for the national economy—agriculture, local industry, capital construction, work organization, financial expenditure, etc.—should be implemented unconditionally once they are approved by the county people's assembly after the collective deliberation of the county Party committee" (Kim Il Sung 1960b, 132–133). This was not some arbitrary decision from the top—which had been a problem—but a decision "owned" by the farmers themselves, since their extensive input was crucial for the decision in the first place. Of course, the cycle would continue, with further critical input into planning and decisions.

As with the experiences in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, a further factor was the need for constant Party-building. This entailed not merely training in the methods of active democratic participation so that participants could engage productively, but also education in Marxism-Leninism so that the theoretical framework and principles for the approach could be understood.[16] And in a recognition of the long Confucian tradition concerning virtue or moral excellence, education should include this dimension as well: "the communist has a higher morality and has a greater regard for the fine customs of his people than anyone else" (Kim Il Sung

1960a, 79). Party-building is a constant theme through all of the material I have studied for this chapter, and in this respect the DPRK is no different from other socialist countries.

It is hardly necessary to point out the role that the Chongsanri method plays in substantial and widespread consultative democracy. Instituted in 1960 after considerable development, it was by no means seen as fixed in stone. Further refinements in light of ongoing and new problems, lack of application of the overall method and falling back into old ways, new insights in light of experience, and the ever-present need for education in the process and political awareness indicate—as with all aspects of socialist construction—that this feature of Korean consultative democracy faced continual challenges and is always a work in progress. Examples include the "sub-workteam management system," initially proposed at the Twelfth Plenum of the Fourth Central Committee in November of 1965 (Kim Il Sung 1965a, 33–36; Brun and Hersch 1976, 340–341). Trialled in 1966 and rolled out across the country over the next couple of years (Kim Il Sung 1968), this method changed the emerging practice of setting production yields too high for large collective farms, and the sending of rural work teams to work on many different projects. Instead, a team of 10–25 farmers would be in charge of an area of land, a task, or an instrument of production. Not only did this approach provide a greater sense of responsibility and ability to see results, but it also involved every member participating in developing micro-plans in light of concrete conditions. This modification led to greater social, political, and economic involvement of every member of the team, but above all saw a distinct rise in agricultural productivity.

### 7.4.3 Taean Method in Industry

In the same way that the Chonsanri method developed during an "on-the-spot guidance" visit to the agricultural collective in question, so also did the Taean work system.[17] These guidance visits were less about the Party leadership descending upon a local work site and telling them what to do; instead, through intensive meetings and consultations, lasting days and sometimes weeks, they sought critical and constructive engagement from the workers themselves (Brun and Hersch 1976, 351–352). The mass line, obviously, but also the reality of the substantial leadership team[18] itself

being subjected through “vehement speeches” to serious criticism and concrete proposals for improvement (Kim Il Sung 1961a, 411).

On this occasion, Kim Il Sung and his comrades went, in December of 1961, to the Taean Electrical Machinery Plant in what is now—since 2010—Nampo Special City.[19] As with the previous year’s visit to Chongsanri, the process was in-depth, robust, and extremely detailed. However, the results were not simply an application of the methods introduced at Chongsanri and other collective farms, for the situation of a vital electrical machinery plant that produces a full range of products was distinct. The underlying principle, however, was the same: comprehensive involvement of local Party members and factory workers in the full production process, along with increased responsibility for a competent leadership, all the way from the Bureau of Machine Industry to the factory’s engineers and technical personnel in areas of expertise.

In terms of background, the Taean work system was preceded by a number of transitional stages, beginning with the autonomy of enterprises after liberation in 1945 so as to keep existing works operating. This lasted barely a year, before the shift to an industry management committee, which worked with and was overseen by a local people’s committee. Soon enough, this approach shifted to a more Soviet approach, with industries fully nationalised and a specialist appointed to oversee the whole industry and implement the centralised plan. This approach in turn became in adequate, since it entailed copying a template from another socialist country and was not suited to the particular and relatively less-developed situation in Korea. Now two vectors came together: the previous year’s experience at Chongsanri had developed a principle of consultative management in the rural sector (see above) that arose from intensive consultation with farmers, and the industrial sector needed an overhaul to suit Korean conditions. In short, it entailed the dialectical combination of planning and the mass line. As a Korean scholar from the time put it, the Taean work system seeks to “strengthen the leading role of the Party in the economy, to draw broad working masses into active management and control of factories, and to encourage them to display their creative capacity and talent to the fullest extent” (Kim Byong Sik 1970, 129).

The results: first, the previous system in which the ministry of industry appointed an individual manager was replaced with collective management through the Party’s factory committee; second, streamlining the supply of

raw materials to the factory and ensuring the welfare of workers; third, the development of more comprehensive planning based on the input from workers on the factory floor (Kim Il Sung 1961a, 425–442; Brun and Hersch 1976, 352).[20] In the revised system, the highest local authority became the Party factory committee, which—crucially—includes managers and engineers, along with leaders of the working people's organisations in the factory. It seeks to gain empirical data for decisions and planning by engaging directly and frequently with workers on the shop floor. The inevitable problems arising in the construction process—ranging all the way from machinery breakdown to disagreements and sickness—are solved directly by the committee. For the sake of efficiency, the Party committee is relatively small, usually numbering 25–35 members, with an executive of about a quarter of the size that carries on the tasks of the committee between its fortnightly meetings. Further, the Party committee is the crucial point of contact with higher levels of Party organisation, so it became the primary conduit between the shop floor and the wider Party and its policies. As one can imagine, all of this work for a small number of executive committee members, or indeed the slightly larger Party committee, would be far too much. The work is both made easier and enables far greater involvement of workers through the Party organisations in each unit within the factory, as well as the work team leaders. Brun and Hersch observe—on the basis of a comprehensive research visit to the Taean Electrical Machinery Plant—that everyone has a "clear understanding of problems and the significance of their efforts in the light of the entire socioeconomic context" (Brun and Hersch 1976, 354). And with understanding comes responsibility instead of buck-passing.

In seeking to rationalise the organisational structure of the factory, one may speak of an appropriate division of labour in a socialist context. The more technical side saw the establishment of a "general staff" which is headed by a chief engineer and assistant directors. This unit oversees all of the many aspects of production, such as ensuring the supply of raw materials, production of goods, storage, and distribution. This is only one of the responsibilities, with a sub-unit known as the "material supply department" overseen by one of the assistant directors. A further sub-unit is the "labour supply and financial department," which is responsible for work rosters and wages, but also for shifting work teams to other areas where needed and seeking always to improve production efficiency. The final sub-

unit is devoted the well-being of workers, including food supply from local collective farms, housing, education for children, cultural activities, health, and so on.

The other dimension is the Party committee, which tends to focus on the Party's organisational concerns, as well as theoretical and political education across the board (Kim Il Sung 1961b, 391–397). As we have seen with the Chongsanri method, Party building is an inescapable feature of any enterprise in the DPRK. Yet, it is more than simply Party building, for all workers partake of the theoretical and practical educational activities. That said, it would be artificial to distinguish simply between the "specialists" and the "reds." Not only are the "general staff" and its sub-units responsible for imbuing a revolutionary spirit among the workers, but the Party committee and its cells also have a hand in matters relating to production. For this reason, in the thorough reorganisation signalled at the Taean plant the Party committee itself includes the engineer in charge of the "general staff," along with the directors of the sub-units (Kim Il Sung 1961a, 442–451). Thus, the division is labour is more one of emphasis or degree than any sharp distinction.

### 7.4.4 Summary: Unity of Opposites

As with the Chongsanri method, the Taean work system would undergo constant reassessment and revision, such as the shift to more collective guidance some twenty years later (Kim Il Sung 1981). Yet these two key features of consultative democracy continue today, seeking to embody at a very concrete level in agriculture and industry the Marxist dialectical principle of the unity of opposites: the extensive engagement of workers within the processes of problem-solving and decision-making goes hand in hand with a rigorous implementation of the decisions reached at the level of county and factory Party committees, and indeed of planning at higher levels. Of course, one should not assume that this is always a smooth process, for substantive criticism and self-criticism are meant to make one sweat and squirm. But this is precisely the point: instead of blaming someone else for a problem, or passing it up the line, problems are owned and solved on the shop floor. So also with decisions and plans, for these are owned by workers who can see their input into the decisions. In his long speech at the Taean Electrical Machinery Plant, Kim Il Sung observes: "we can say that this is a pleasant meeting, rather than a troublesome one, to

discuss how to scrub quickly the dirt off our bodies and how to do a better job and advance more rapidly in the future" (Kim Il Sung 1961a, 413).

Two final points of a more economic nature, which I cannot address in full here. First, in both the Chongsanri and Taean methods, one find a resolute emphasis on the socialist principle of "from each according to ability and to each according to work" (Boer 2017). Within limits, remuneration for work is commensurable with the amount of work and contribution made (Kim Il Sung 1960a, 57–61, 1960b, 140–147). Second, as with other socialist countries that achieved national liberation through anti-colonial struggle, the importance of liberating the productive forces for the sake of economic development was never forgotten or neglected. On this matter, let me quote Kim Byong Sik: "In any society the form of production relations and economic structure must correspond to the level of development of productive forces and the nature of the economic base of society." Thus, the significance of both the Chonsanri and Taean methods is that they seek the "economic management system best suited to the expanding productive forces," improving the "superstructure, the administrative system of the Party, state and economic organizations in such a way that these may be adapted fully to the established base" (Kim Byong Sik 1970, 111 and 133).

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## 7.5 Leadership of the Workers Party

As with other socialist countries, an inescapable feature of governance is the leadership of the Communist Party. In Korea, it was called the Communist Party until August–September 1946, when the name was changed to the Workers' Party of Korea (Kim Ji Ho 2016, 47–49). I am less interested here in the historical development of the Party,[21] and more in the key question as to how its leadership relates to the structures of governance analysed above. On a broader level, we find the repeated point that it is only through the Workers' Party that the people can be "masters of the state and society" and "responsible for the revolution and construction" (Han 2016, 1). In more detail:

> Party leadership is an intrinsic requirement in the building of a socialist State and a lifeline of its activities. A party is the incarnation of the demands and interests of the masses, and only

> under its leadership can the socialist State perform its mission as their servant with credit and properly organize and undertake unified guidance over all realms of social life and all regions, as well as overall socialist construction (Kim Jong Un 2019, 82).

This dialectical point we have already seen emerging in the Soviet Union, but it is enhanced in East Asian countries such as the DPRK and China with their dialectical traditions and emphasis on the people's needs.

### 7.5.1 The State Affairs Commission

As a case study, I would like to focus on the State Affairs Commission (SAC), which is made up exclusively of members of the WPK. The key question to be addressed is how the SAC relates to the other structures of governance, such as the local and country-wide people's assemblies, the standing committee of the SPA, and the Democratic Front. To put it more sharply: given the wide-ranging powers of the SAC, how does it relate to the structures of governance analysed above?

A little more detail: the SAC is a successor of the National Defence Committee, which restricted its concerns to military matters. With a change of name in 2016, the SAC's mandate has been expanded considerably. As the 2016 constitution observes, the SAC is the "the supreme policy-oriented leadership body of State power," with the following responsibilities:

1. discuss and decide important policies of the State, including those for defence building;
2. exercise supervision over the fulfilment of the orders of the Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the decisions and directives of the State Affairs Commission, and take measures for their fulfilment;
3. abrogate decisions and directives of State organs which run counter to the orders of the Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the decisions and directives of the State Affairs Commission (Supreme People's Assembly 2016, article 109).

These are rather significant powers, and when we add that the chairperson of the SAC is also the country's supreme leader—and now designated internationally as president—we have a very powerful body indeed. Recall that the SPA and its Standing Committee also have—respectively—a chairperson and a president, but that the country's leader does not take on that role. Further, the chairperson of the SAC "controls all the political, economic and military affairs" of the DPRK (Han 2016, 50). In more detail, the chairperson has the following duties:

1. direct the overall affairs of the State;
2. personally guide the work of the State Affairs Commission;
3. appoint or remove key cadres of the State;
4. ratify or rescind major treaties concluded with other countries;
5. exercise the right of granting special pardon;
6. proclaim a state of emergency, a state of war and mobilization order within the country;
7. organize and direct the National Defence Committee in wartime (Supreme People's Assembly 2016, article 103).

Extensive these powers are, so we are led to ask why any other governmental structures exist. Why bother with the complex processes of selecting candidates by the Democratic Front, with the electoral processes of the SPA and its Standing Committee, if the SAC's chairperson holds all the power? Here we need to be careful indeed, and avoid falling into trap of viewing the rest of the world through the distorted Western liberal lens.

A proper answer to this question begins with the point that the SAC and its chairperson are "accountable to the Supreme People's Assembly", and their terms are the same as delegates to the SPA (Supreme People's Assembly 2016, articles 105 and 111; Han 2016, 50–51). Accountability is the operative word here: if the SAC and its chairperson do not live up to the

high expectations of the SPA they can be dismissed from office. And it is the SPA that determines whether the SAC has lived up to the heavy responsibilities placed upon it. We may speak here of the democratic supervision of the SAC by the SPA and its Standing Committee. Further, the SPA delegates powers to the SAC. Even the supreme leader must be appointed to the SAC. This is by no means a given and certainly not hereditary. Let me put it this way: it is precisely because the SAC and the supreme leader have the powers mentioned above that the delegated and supervisory power of the SPA must be rigorous and thorough.

### 7.5.2 The Regulated Order of WPK Leadership

I have used the example of the SAC as a microcosm of the role of the WPK within the structures of socialist governance. Obviously, the WPK does not rule by fiat, simply giving orders that everyone must obey. But how does it work? According to Han Su Yong (2016, 13), the system of governing bodies "regulates the order in which the state power is established and exercised." There are three points in this brief observation. First, the whole system of socialist governance "regulates the order." It provides a regulatory framework, or what are called in China the "statutory processes" for governance and the leadership of the WPK. Second, this is the means by which state power is established. This is a reference to historical legitimacy, in the sense that the WPK was—in its earlier forms—primarily responsible for the revolutionary struggle and the establishment of the DPRK itself. As Kim Jong Un observes (2015b, 54), the WPK drew on the strength of the masses in a "land where centuries-old backwardness and poverty had prevailed" and built a "powerful country in the face of pernicious blockade imposed by the imperialists." In other words, socialist state power was established by the WPK in the face of immense opposition. Third is the exercise of state power. We may speak here—and I deploy a Chinese distinction—of the present realities, of the practical legitimacy of the WPK within the system of socialist governance. It is precisely this exercise of state power that is regulated through the many bodies of governance and their functions. The WPK cannot work outside the whole system of which it is a part; indeed, the possibility and reality of its leadership is determined by the whole system.

To sum up, this is a profoundly dialectical reality. To begin with, the governing bodies provide the appropriate channels or structures for state

power, the necessary statutory processes that seek to ensure—crucially—that the common people have a say in the many aspects of governance and administration. At the same time, the whole system of governing bodies regulates the order in which the WPK exercises its leadership. Even more, the leadership of the WPK is not simply determined by the structures of socialist governance; instead, this leadership is enhanced and strengthened by the statutory processes of governance, enhancing what is often called the "single-hearted unity" and the "strict revolutionary discipline" of the Party (Kim Jong Un 2012a, 10–11). So also is the whole socialist governing system enhanced and guaranteed by the leadership of the WPK.

## 7.6 Summary: Human Rights and the Administration of Things for the True Interests of Society

In summing up this detailed examination of socialist governance in the DPRK, I would like to return to Engels's principle concerning the administration of the stuff of life for the true interests of society (Sect. 2.5.3) and Lenin's emphasis on developing the appropriate structures for administering and managing the economy so as to improve the everyday lives of workers and peasants (Sect. 3.4.1). In the DPRK this feature is not only emphasised but has been developed further. They speak of a "well-knit work system" in which governance as a whole manages all aspects of society (Han 2016, 14). Further, the people's government and socialist system may together be seen by the people as an "administrator responsible for their livelihood and the protector of their independent and creative life" (Kim Jong Un 2015c, 44). This emphasis is particularly notable in the Chongsanri method in agriculture and the Taean work method in industry, which I have analysed in terms of consultative democracy. We should also recall the important role of the Democratic Front, as well as the full range of people's assemblies from the local levels to the SPA. Again and again, it is reiterated that the purpose is to develop the productive forces and constantly adapt the relations of production to such development, as well as constantly reforming the superstructural features of governance and society as the economic base improves. That this takes place in a context of more than seventy years of embargoes and sanctions makes the task even more

arduous, or as a young Korean person in the DPRK pointed out in a conversation: “socialism is struggle.”

In many respects, the emphasis on the true interests of society is also a manifestation of the Marxist approach to human rights. We have already seen some initial developments of this approach in the Soviet Union, with the emphasis on freedom from exploitation and the proactive nature of rights (see Sect. 5.3.3). It is, unfortunately, not so well-known that the DPRK has a more thoroughly developed approach to human rights, and I recommend in particular a work by Kim Ji Ho (2017). The emphases of this work should be noted carefully. It predicates human rights on anti-colonial or anti-hegemonic sovereignty, which offers a thorough redefinition of the concept of sovereignty in light of the struggle against colonialism. Without national sovereignty, any other right is meaningless. However, the core human right is that of socio-economic well-being, or the right to a prosperous and happy life—although this is noticeably missing in the thin definition of human rights arising from the Western liberal tradition. Closely related are the rights to dignity, existence, and inviolability, but from here all other rights may develop, whether the rights to work and leisure (so also in the Soviet Union), equality between women and men, to land, labour, education, health, religion, political involvement, and so on. I mention this material here, since readers need to be aware of the DPRK’s approach. A full study, however, would require a separate work.

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## 7.7 Theory: “Believe in the People as in Heaven”

Earlier, I mentioned that Kim Il Sung had appropriated the Chondoist-inspired slogan, “the people are my God,” or “believe in the people as in heaven” (Kim Il Sung 1994, V, 326). When studying material concerning the DPRK, this saying recurs again and again, especially in the more recent works by Kim Jong Un. Instead of a full exposition of the three phases of political theory in the DPRK, I will focus primarily on the new era that began with Kim Jong Un’s election in 2012. I do so since it is most relevant today, and also because the two earlier stages are relatively well-known.

### 7.7.1 Juche and Songun

The first was Kim Il Sung’s *Juche*, or a people-first philosophy in which the masses are masters of their destiny through the struggles of revolutionary

construction, independence, and self-sufficiency (Kim Il Sung 1955; Kim Jong Il 1982; Kim Song Gwon 2014).[22] We may also see *Juche* as a clear identification of socialism with Korean characteristics (Kim Il Sung 1955, 411–412; 1960b, 114). The second phase was *Songun*, which was promoted by Kim Jong Il and arose in response to the immense challenges of the 1990s, and identifies the military as the prime revolutionary force that is able to drive economic recovery and preserve sovereignty (Kim Jong Il 1992; Kim Chol 2002; Kim Chang Gyong 2014). One may find much material on these two approaches (some of which are cited), although I would like to emphasise a particular feature of their development—apart from their desire to designate a more autochthonous socialism. Each phase does not seek to negate the one that had gone before, for this would be somewhat self-defeating and would reek of capitalist democracies in which one political party spends all its time undoing the actions of the other whilst in governance. Instead, the developments in the DPRK may be described as continuity with differing emphases. Thus, Kim Jong Un speaks of a "new era of the *Juche* revolution" and has affirmed the important role of military modernisation, especially in terms of nuclear deterrence. At the same time, he stresses a renewed emphasis on a concrete people-first approach that is now known—tellingly—as *Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism*.

Before moving to consider this approach in greater detail, not a few readers may remain puzzled by the apparently hereditary nature of the DPRK's leadership. Korean scholars emphasise that the hereditary system of old was based on property, privilege, and exploitation, and that this is certainly not the case in Korea today. Instead, the focus is on the continuation of revolutionary leadership in practice and theory, and a new leader needs to be affirmed by the people's trust. It is notable here that it was Kim Jong Il's third child, who actually became the new leader, and this was only after a considerable period of assessing whether he would in fact be accepted by the common people.

### 7.7.2 People First: Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism

Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism was identified very soon after Kim Jong-Un's election as the first secretary of the WPK (Kim Jong Un 2012a). The continuity is notable, but so also is the "new era" with a distinct emphasis: "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is, in essence, the people-first principle" (Kim Jong Un 2015b, 58). But what exactly does this mean?

Let us focus on what may be considered Kim Jong Un's inaugural manifesto, which was delivered to the WPK's Central Committee in April 2012 after he was elected as first secretary. After reiterating the importance of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and stressing the need to maintain military development in the face of hostile imperialism,[23] Kim Jong Un turns to the tasks at hand. The bulk of the speech signals the emphases of his tenure as general secretary, specifically the improvement of the socio-economic conditions and well-being of the people. Many are the dimensions, such as food security, housing, drinking water, and fuel (important for a cold climate). Not to be excluded here are education, health, literature and the arts. But how are these to be achieved in a country subject to decades of sanctions and threats? Kim Jong Un speaks of a knowledge-based industrial revolution in the new century, involving the core roles of science and technology in developing the vanguard heavy industries (power, metallurgy, coal, rail), and a whole new phase of IT development along with light industry for the production of everyday necessities (Kim Jong Un 2012a, 17–26).

In many respects, this speech would set the agenda for the decade to come (Kim Jong Un 2019, 84–98), as is evident when we study the speeches and texts that emphasise and develop points from the initial manifesto: land management, in terms of agriculture, pollution prevention, reafforestation, coastal areas, and housing that suits local traditions (Kim Jong Un 2012b, 2015a); rural revitalisation for the sake of food self-sufficiency (Kim Jong Un 2014a); educational development, whether in science and technology, social sciences, or universities (Kim Jong Un 2012c, 2016a); a comprehensive building project that develops the unique architectural tradition of the DPRK for the sake of improved housing (Kim Jong Un 2013b); and—last but by no means least—Party-building (Kim Jong Un 2014b). A notable theme throughout this material is the emphasis on young people—such as himself—who are the future of the Party and the country, and the need for improved education and living standards for coming generations (Ro 2020). Indeed, the three-point strategy he proposes is to focus on the people, the army, and young people as the foremost weapons in the DPRK's development (Kim Jong Un 2015b, 57–58; see also 2016b, 15–16).

Socialist countries have always stressed the need for economic self-sufficiency. Hostile external environments play a role, but these are not the

determining factors. Instead—and here we need to deploy dialectical materialism—it is internal processes that bring about qualitative transformation. Let us go further: of all socialist countries, the drive to economic self-sufficiency has arguably had the greatest emphasis in the DPRK. Thus, the "primary effort to improving the people's living standards" so that the people "enjoy the benefits of socialism to their heart's content and lead a happy life" is to be achieved through their own efforts (Kim Jong Un 2015c, 47). This is by no means an easy task, especially in a relatively small, mountainous country, rich in mineral resources for industry but with limited arable land. In this light, we should also recognise the roles of historical partners, such as the Soviet Union and now Russia as well as China. Many have been the innovations in food production and technology in the DPRK, so much so that the attentive visitor cannot help being impressed, but the inescapable role of China in its relative prosperity should not be ignored. For example, between my two research trips to the DPRK, I noticed some distinct changes. In 2015, early in Kim Jong Un's tenure, there were still many residual problems from the devastating decade of the 1990s: running water was still not plentiful, ageing public transport, many buildings in need of repair and maintenance, and the products of light industry few and far between. The contrast in October of 2018 was noticeable everywhere. The roads were bustling with vehicles, many new electronic products could be found everywhere, food problems were well and truly being overcome, shelves in the shops were full, and the effects of a continuing and massive rebuilding program were evident. In the countryside, new houses—simple, solid, and comfortable—continued to be constructed. In the city, vast new building projects were underway, deploying the DPRK's unique architectural tradition (Kim Kyong Chol and Kim Kum Hui 2019, 23–58; Thak and Jang 2021). One of our guides said that she had spent a year on a building site, as all students do at some time. Noticeably, in the standard hotel in which we stayed in Pyongyang there were many Chinese delegates busy developing trade and business opportunities.

With all this in mind, a careful study of Kim Jong Un's texts reveals a candidness that is reminiscent of his grandfather. He is quite willing to admit failures to achieve the desired goals, remonstrating with himself and the Party for their shortcomings. A good example is to be found in Kim Jong Un's opening and closing addresses to the WPK's eighth congress in

early 2021. The congress was convened in the wake of the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the country shut its borders completely (they would reopen to trade with China in late 2021, only to close again April 2022 when the pandemic finally broke out in the country), and then a series of devastating floods that required the emergency rebuilding of tens of thousands of homes.[24] It seemed as though all of the plans put forward in the initial years of his tenure has fallen well short of their goals, with living standards in regional cities and the countryside still at undesirably low levels. The opening and closing speeches are peppered with references to the "unprecedented, worst-ever trials" that put "great obstacles" in the way, with the "bitter lessons" to be learned from failing to achieve the economic targets set at the previous congress (Kim Jong Un 2016b), with criticism in a "detailed and severe manner" of the mistakes and even deviations of the last five years, and of his heavy heart in setting out to solve the "knottiest problems" (Kim Jong Un 2021a, 1, 3, 4, 6, 2021b, 1). Of course, there is a rhetorical style here, in which the dire problems becomes the basis for a call to a renewed effort, but it is the candidness of the criticisms and admissions of falling short that are most notable.

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## 7.8 Conclusion: From the Unity of Opposites to Communism

In drawing this chapter to a close, I would like to address two issues, one of a more philosophical nature, and the other concerning communism. Philosophically, let us recall one of the core principles of dialectical materialism, as identified by Engels and developed by Lenin: the unity through struggle of opposites. For Lenin, the struggle of opposites was the norm as unity contingent, as we also see with Mao Zedong's lectures of the 1930s (1937a, 1937b). Another vector also plays a role in a country like the DPRK, with the long philosophical influence of Confucianism and the dialectical emphasis on opposites as also complementary. We may speak of a both-and approach, embodied metaphysically in *yin-yang*.

However, in the DPRK the emphasis is clearly on the *unity* of opposites. Many are the aspects, whether the Chondoist notion of heaven manifested on earth, or the people as God, the constant emphasis on the "single-hearted," integral and "harmonious whole" of the WPK and the masses

(Kim Jong Un 2012a, 3), albeit not without regular reference to the need to overcome factionalism and opportunism. We may go further, specifically on the question of governance: of all socialist countries the distinction between state and society is simply not valid, so much so that the DPRK embodies to a high degree Engels's principle that the organs of governance should stand in the midst of, should be enmeshed with, society (Kim Ji Ho 2016, 7–8). All of this takes in the context of a profound bifurcation of the Korean peninsula and indeed—if I may use such terms—of the Korean spirit, marked by the 38th Parallel. Ever since the initial project of a liberated Korea that could decide its own destiny was frustrated by imperialist impositions, the approach developed has been realistic: reunification should be undertaken without outside interference, peacefully and in terms of a federal system, socialist in the north and capitalist in the south in what would be known as the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo.[25] This position was made explicit in the Communiqué of 1972, after the leaders of both countries had met secretly (Kim Il Sung 1972). These would form the core of many subsequent iterations and developments (Kim Il Sung 1993), and reunification remains an inescapable topic in speeches today (Ma 2010). Waves of hope—the most recent being 2018–2019 (Kim Kyong Chol and Kim Kum Hui 2019, 58–95)—are followed by disappointment. Clearly, unity of opposites will retain a significant element of struggle until such reunification is achieved.

Finally, what is the ultimate aim in the DPRK? Let us give Kim Il Sung the final word:

> The transition from socialism to communism requires a further development of the productive forces, the production of goods in ever larger quantities and also communist remoulding of people's consciousness. To make communism a reality goods must be abundant enough to fully gratify the desires of the people (Kim Il Sung 1960a, 58).

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# Footnotes

1 The study by Suzy Kim (2013c) shows this reality very well, based—somewhat perversely—on archival documents from 1945–1950 that were stolen during the brief US occupation of the north in 1950.

2 The United States' efforts in the Pacific was a sideshow, accounting for less than 25% of Japan's war effort.

3 That the initially civil war was begun by the anti-communist hit-man and dictator, Syngman Rhee, is by now historical fact—despite US and southern Korean propaganda (Brun and Hersch 1976, 90–98; Liem 1993; Ryo 1995). Rhee's southern regime was riven with revolt and was on the verge of economic and political collapse. The USA saw an opportunity to strike not merely at the emerging socialist society in the northern part of the peninsula, but also at the newly established People's Republic of China. The US's resounding defeat, and indeed rout, at the hands of Chinese and Korean forces that had vastly inferior weapons technology, has led to this episode being known as the "forgotten" or "unknown war," in the USA at least (Cumings 2011).

4 The following draws on Choe and Pak (2018, 6–11).

5 For a useful overview of the era of revolutionary struggle led by Kim Il Sung, see Cumings's otherwise patchy book (2004, 103–127).

6 A *ri* is an administrative district based on the village.

7 For overviews of subsequent developments, including the constitution of 1948, the establishment of the National Defence Commission in light of Songun politics, and the transition to the State Affairs Commission in 2016, see Choe and Pak (2018, 70–73, 100–103, 134).

8 In 1998, the original Standing Committee was abolished and a new Presidium with a president was established. In 2021, the name of the Presidium was changed to the Standing Committee of the SPA and continues the roles of the former Presidium.

9 I have dealt with Chondoism and Kim Il Sung's engagement with and assessment of the religion in an earlier work (Boer 2019, 216–222; Kim Il Sung 1994, V, 332–356).

10 The "five commandments" of Chondoism have a worship focus: *Jumun* (a 21–word formula), *Chongsu* (offering of clean water), *Siil* (church worship on Sundays), *Songmi* (rice donation) and *Kido* (prayers) (Kim Il Sung 1994, V, 321).

11 Other principles also have traction: "my heart is your heart," with reference both to others and to "heaven"; "treat humans as God" in a challenge to Confucian hierarchies; "protect the nation, secure peace for the people" with reference to Korea in relation to foreign powers; "all people evolve to unity" which is relevant for Korean reunification; and "the Kingdom of heaven on earth.".

12 One of the more well-known expressions of the mass line at an artistic level are the mass gymnastics, known more informally as the "mass games" (Collective 2018).

13 A number of key texts from Kim Il Sung are pertinent, and I have drawn on two studies by scholars who have engaged in extensive research in the DPRK (Kim Il Sung 1960a, b; Kim Byong Sik 1970, 113–118; Brun and Hersch 1976, 336–341).

14 Competent "cadres should learn from the masses," for without going among the masses, a supervisor cannot learn, but this does not mean that everyone should draw their own conclusions, since this "would lead to a state of anarchy" (Kim Il Sung 1960a, 69).

15 The 1953 reforms abolished the intermediate level of township, so that the county committee was directly connected with the *ri* Party committee. The number of *ri* was also reduced from 10,666 to 3,772.

16 The question of education is beyond the remit of this chapter, save to note that the DPRK—in light of shortages in technical and educated personnel due the colonial and wartime depredations—developed a unique on-the-job educational system, as well as the concrete integration of theory and practice in the school system (Brun and Hersch 1976, 227–256). Bourgeois models would simply not work, since many bourgeois intellectuals "possessed advanced academic knowledge but a somewhat retarded ideological and political consciousness" (Brun and Hersch 1976, 248).

17 The material in this section draws on a number of key resources and empirical research (Kim Il Sung 1961a; b; Kim Byong Sik 1970, 119–135; Brun and Hersch 1976, 331–360).

18 Substantial it was, with Kim Il Sung "accompanied by vice-premiers, heads of departments of the Party Central Committee, ministers and other officials" (Kim Il Sung 1961b, 371).

19 The advance in industry should be noted. Upon liberation in 1945, there was very little production of machinery useful for economic construction; by the beginning of the 1960s substantial heavy industry had been established (Kim Il Sung 1961a, 411–412).

20 These arose from detailed identification of previous problems, especially the chaotic and ad hoc nature of management (Kim Il Sung 1961b, 372–383).

21 For a detailed study of the Party's history, see Kim Ji Ho (2016).

22 The meaning of *Juche* is drawn from the Chinese 主体 *zhuti*, which initially functioned as a translation of Marx's use of *Subjekt*. It was explicitly appropriated and reshaped by Kim Il Sung for the first time at the Kalun Conference of 30 June, 1930, after which it became a consistent theme throughout his writings. Many thanks to Keith Bennett for this point.

23 Although subsumed within the people-first emphasis, the policy of Songun would be developed in terms of upgrading the military and developing nuclear deterrence capabilities (Kim Jong Un 2013a).

24 The comparison between two works, one from 2019 and the other from 2021, reveals a notable change of tone. Whereas the first, by Kim Kum Hui (2019), is notably upbeat in light of the significant achievement of the previous few years (and as I noticed in late 2018), the second, by Ri Yong Ok (2021), is forthright in addressing the extraordinary turn of events in 2020 and the profound challenges faced.

25 After much study, it is also increasingly obvious to me that the DPRK has the more robust and stable system of governance than the dysfunctional one in the south, so many changes would need to take place there.

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# 8. China's Whole Process People's Democracy

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## 8.1 Opening Remarks

This chapter focuses on a speech by Xi Jinping from late 2021, concerning "whole process people's democracy". The speech was initially delivered at a CPC Central Committee working conference for the National People's Congress (NPC). The conference took place on the 13th of October, 2021, but the speech itself was first published in full in *Qiushi*, the CPC Central Committee's journal, in the fifth issue of 2022, on the 28th of February (Xi 2022b).[1] The timing was not accidental, for it appeared as thousands of delegates were preparing for the National People's Congress's (NPC) annual session in March of 2022. This would also be the first meeting of the NPC after the centenary celebrations of the CPC in the previous year. Given the initial context and its subsequent publication, it is no surprise that the speech has a particular emphasis on the People's Congresses. But this is by no means all, for the speech identifies key principles of the development of socialist democracy in the new era. Indeed, the name for this new development—whole process people's democracy—does not appear in the title, but only later, receiving a fuller explication as to its meaning towards the close of the speech. This was not the first time the term had been mentioned,[2] but it provided a new burst of scholarly interest. While the speech sets the framework for this chapter, this is by no means the only

occasion on which Xi Jinping has spoken and written about socialist democracy and China's system of governance. I will refer to such material where needed. Finally, a stylistic note: the collective leadership texts that appear under Xi Jinping's name have developed a distinct stylistic feature in which quotations are often drawn from China's long and rich tradition. Of course, we can also see this process in material from earlier general secretaries, but Xi's texts are even more notable in this respect. For those interested, I will identify the sources in footnotes.

In what follows, I begin by providing an overview of the development of socialist democracy in China from the beginnings with the anti-colonial struggle of the nineteenth century, through Mao Zedong's new democracy, democratic dictatorship, and democratic centralism, to the full panoply of components that were established during the reform and opening-up. However, my main concern is to identify the emphases in developing socialist democracy from the time of the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012 and then the tasks at hand today. There are three main features that arise from this material.

First is the importance of the mass line as the foundation of people's democracy, along with explicating the meaning of the "people's heart [民心 *minxin*]" or "people's will" in a socialist context, and the crucial role of democratic supervision. All of this may be seen in terms of "the people as masters of the country [为人民当家作主 *renmin dangia zuozhu*]." The second concerns a signature emphasis of Xi Jinping's tenure as general secretary: developing further a comprehensive rule of law. On this topic, I provide a brief historical background to socialist rule of law, before dealing with the project of strengthening the constitution and the need for a robust and constantly updated legal system that focuses on incorporating the virtuous or "good laws [善法 *shanfa*]" that are necessary for a socialist legal system. Third is the leadership of the Communist Party, without which socialist democracy would not exist. Here I focus on the development of "statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*]" through which the Party's proposals become the will of the people, and how Xi Jinping has ensured the development of democratic centralism for country-wide governance. The conclusion to the chapter seeks to define socialist democracy, in light of these three topics, as a dialectical conjunction of Communist Party leadership and the people as masters of the country,

mediated through the full range or “whole process [全过程 *quan guocheng*]” of democratic and rule-of-law statutory procedures. I also ask how democracy may be evaluated in any of its forms. A final introductory note: this chapter is theoretical, but the three main topics—people’s will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—will form the topics for case studies in the next three chapters.

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## 8.2 Background: A Long History of Democratic Struggle

In many respects, the modern history of democratic struggle in China goes back to the anti-colonial struggles of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Opium Wars and coming to initial fruition with Liberation in 1949 (Fang 2015, 14–15). Xi Jinping alludes to these origins by observing that the CPC was able, after long and bloody struggle, to achieve the “historic task of national independence and liberation of the people” (Xi Jinping 2022b, 1). Finally, after a long period when a weak and poor China was subjected to one humiliation after another, was it possible for the people themselves to become the hosts, to take on the role of masters (作主 *zuozhu*) of the country and society.[3] An obvious point that is too often forgotten: anti-colonial struggles for national liberation are inescapably democratic struggles, especially if we recall the core meaning of the Greek *demokratia* and the Chinese 民主 *minzhu*. It is simply impossible for a people subjected to colonial domination to exercise any democratic activity whatsoever (think most recently of Hong Kong SAR, which became democratic only after it was finally returned to China in 1999).

As for the century of the CPC’s own development of socialist democracy (Li 2022a), brief mentions are also made of the three forms of democracy promoted by Mao Zedong: the new democratic revolution in the Red Areas, which involved a united front of political parties and people working for the same cause; democratic dictatorship, which was a distinct development of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, and meant democracy for liberated people in a socialist country and dictatorship over the internal and especially external enemies of the people[4]; and the explication of democratic centralism as a core feature of governance (even if the means for country-wide governance in terms of this approach had not

yet been elaborated). Since I have dealt with this material elsewhere, there is no need to provide yet another account here,[5] save to point out that these earlier stages are not seen as having been replaced by later stages. Instead, the gains and insights have been incorporated and developed further within much higher attainments. For example, the united front of new democracy has become the consultative multi-party system in China, and it was not really until Xi Jinping's tenure that the full implications and realities of democratic centralism for country-wide governance were defined and implemented.

The achievements of the period of the reform and opening-up are both summarised early in the speech and assumed throughout. These include electoral democracy as embodied primarily in the people's congresses, consultative democracy arising out of the mass line and institutionalised in the people's political consultative conferences at many levels, the important sub-group of consultative democracy that is "base-level [基层 *jiceng*]" or grass-roots democracy, rule of law as an over-arching framework for the legal system and very substance of governance, human rights in relation to democratic practices, and preferential policies for minority nationalities. I have dealt with these components of China's socialist democratic system in an earlier work (Boer 2021, 191–230), so my concern in this chapter is with the way Xi Jinping enables a significant step forward for the whole project of socialist democracy in China.

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## 8.3 From the Eighteenth Congress Onwards

As is the nature of such speeches, Xi identifies a number of key points, here divided into two groups of six. The first group specifies emphases since the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress, and the second group concerns the tasks at hand a decade later. The phrase "since the Party's Eighteenth Congress [党的十八大以来 *dang de shibada yilai*]" is a standard way of referring to what has been identified for a while now as the "new era" inaugurated during Xi Jinping's tenure. While there is a continuity with the reform and opening-up in terms of "deepening reform," there are many new emphases that characterise the third phase of the New China, after the initial thirty-year period until 1978 and the reform and opening-up from 1978 to 2012. My interest here is in the emphases concerning socialist democracy.

The best way to highlight these emphases is not so much to analyse each item in the two groups of six points, but to focus on core themes in which we see developments over the last decade. The two groups are as follows, beginning with those that identify the path from the Party's Eighteenth Congress: (1) CPC leadership; (2) the people managing the country's affairs; (3) comprehensively governing the country according to law; (4) democratic centralism; (5) the development path of socialist politics with Chinese characteristics; (6) and the need to modernise the governing system and its capacity. The second group, with a focus on the tasks ahead, concern the consolidation and strengthening of the governing system in light of new developments: (1) upholding the constitution, which is inescapably connected with rule of law; (2) developing the socialist legal structures (法律体系 *falü tixi*); (3) democratic oversight and supervision; (4) reflecting and acting on the people's will; (5) self-improvement of the governing system based on increasing awareness of how the system works; (6) and CPC leadership.

A scan of these topics reveals both obvious and deeper commonalities, so I will analyse them in terms of three key themes. The first concerns the resolute emphasis on the people. Many are the ways this emphasis is expressed, whether "taking the people as centre," or "people-centred," the "people as masters of the country," and so on. Obviously, these are explications of the core meaning of democracy. In this case, I am interested in how the people managing the country's affairs moves towards a greater emphasis on the democratic system reflecting and acting upon the people's will. It also includes the improvements in democratic supervision and oversight. A people-centred approach has been a hallmark of Xi Jinping's tenure, but he has also—and this is the second topic—ensured what is arguably the greatest development in governing structures in the history of the New China since 1949. This topic may be designated rule of law, or, more fully, comprehensively governing the country according to the rule of law. I am particularly interested in the historical development of socialist rule of law and its relation to the legal system, in the role of the constitution, and in a robust legal structure that seeks to be distinctly socialist in promoting virtuous or "good laws [善法 *shanfa*]." Related is the third topic concerning the leadership of the CPC, without which the whole structure would simply not work. Here a dialectic comes into play: socialist democracy is improved and strengthened by CPC leadership, and that

leadership is developed further through socialist democracy. All of this may be summed up as whole process people's democracy. Throughout there is a constant emphasis on the fact the system is not a given, but needs constant improvement and development.

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## 8.4 *Minzhu*: The People as Masters of the Country

As I have found on numerous occasions, the opinion among the common people (老百姓 *laobaixing*) in China is that Xi Jinping is "not bad [不错 *bucuo*]." This understatement expresses significant approval in a no-nonsense manner. When I ask why, the typical answer is that Xi reminds them of Mao, since he has the common people at heart. This should not be a surprise, for a major emphasis since the first days of Xi Jinping's tenure has been the people of China, in all the many types of labour in which they are engaged and among all minority nationalities. I have already indicated the key phrase that captures this emphasis—"taking the people as centre [以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*]"—but let us see how it emerges in the text under consideration.

### 8.4.1 The Mass Line and the Will of the People

The first point concerns the people's heart or will. On this matter, Xi begins with a quotation from the tradition: "The foundational requirement of governance is to obey the heart of the people [为政之要, 以顺民心为本 *wei zheng zhi yao, yi shun minxin wei ben*]." This observation comes from the Northern Song Dynasty scholar and court politician Cheng Yi (1033–1107 CE), whose text has: "The way [道 *dao*] to governance is to obey the people's heart, to improve people's livelihood, to keep peace, and not disturb the people."[6] The people's heart or will (心 *xin*) is obviously not a new concept in the millennia-long tradition of good governance in China. The use of this saying, however, is not to be seen as a continuity of the imperial system in China, but simply in terms of identifying a core concept that takes on a whole new meaning in the Communist tradition.

In setting out the way to express the people's will, Xi evokes the deep tradition of the mass line (群众路线 *qunzhong luxian*). Why not elections?

They are mentioned frequently elsewhere in the speech, especially since Xi is addressing a working conference of delegates to the people's congresses. As I have outlined in an earlier work (Boer 2021, 193–194), there are five levels of people's congresses in China, from the most local to the National People's Congress. While the first two levels[7] have direct elections, the next three levels require indirect elections. This simply means that delegates are elected from the lower levels of people's congresses.

At this point, the foundational role of the mass line is evoked.[8] The terms used are telling: heed or respond to the "call of the people [民有所呼 *min you suo hu*]"; very deeply "rooted among the people [深深植根于人民之中 *shen shen zhigenyu renmin zhi gong*]; the need for all organs of governance and those who work in them to "have a firm sense of being the people's servants, put the people in the most important place of their hearts, maintain the closest ties with them, listen attentively to their opinions and suggestions, accept their supervision, and serve them to the utmost." To make the point clear, Xi speaks of enriching the content and forms of "connecting with the masses [联系人民群众 *lianxi renmin qunzhong*]" (Xi 2022b, 4).

In order to understand how the mass line works, let me reprise an earlier description of this deep experience that lies at the heart of a century of the CPC. The word "masses [群众*qunzhong*]" is rich in meaning, with the main sense of the rural and urban workers who are the foundation of the CPC. Further, "masses" has a significant overlap with the "people [人民 *renmin*]," so much so that it is common—as in this speech—to find the two terms in one phrase, 人民群众 *renmin qunzhong*. Thus, expressions such as "taking the people as centre [以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*]" connote the sense of "taking the masses as the centre." Further, "mass organisations" play a key role in China's social and political system. These should not be understood in terms of the social organisations that are found in bourgeois civil society and are so often in tension with the state. By contrast, mass organisations are characterised by their "mass character [群众性 *qunzhongxing*]," which designates the deep roots among the people and the source of the CPC's strength and legitimacy. As to how the mass line has developed over time and functions today, Ma Yide provides a clear description:

> It is inclusive, as the opinions of the broad mobilized masses are listened to; it is guided by reason, as the views of the masses are studied and become the views of the central system; it achieves balance through reflection, as opinions are constantly tested through the actions of the masses; and it links consultation and decision-making, as the views of the masses are elevated into action (Ma 2017, 27).

How do elected delegates to the people's congresses enable and participate in the mass line? To begin with, many of them are locals, drawn from the masses. Thus, enriching and expanding engagement with the masses means that delegates should not lose touch with their roots. Or rather, they should enhance this background to empathise with the people's concerns, pool their wisdom, and enhance their well-being. Further, the "line [路线 *luxian]*" in question has a number of connotations. The word includes two characters, with 路 *lu* meaning path or road, and 线 *xian* a thread or string. Thus, 路线 *luxian* can mean a line on a map or route to follow, an ideological direction, but also a connecting thread. It is a small step to the metaphor of a "bridge" between the Party and the state, a bridge that is constituted by deep "connections with the masses [联系人民群众 *lianxi renmin qunzhong*]."

### 8.4.2 Democratic Supervision

A second emphasis of the speech—in relation to the people as masters of the country—concerns democratic supervision. In a socialist system, such supervision or oversight entails a number of substantial components: supervision by the common people through the mass line; the robust practices of consultative democracy; the Communist Party's substantial practices of criticism and self-criticism; and rigorous rule-of-law procedures. In terms of mass line supervision and the pervasive role of consultative democracy, Zhou Enlai had already pointed out in 1957 that the exercise of state power has the not insignificant risk of becoming divorced from the masses and becoming "dizzy with success." The best solution: supervision by the masses: "without the people, what can the Communist Party do? … If you do right, the people will support you. If you do wrong, the people will not support you" (Zhou 1957, 348–349). Or as Xi Jinping puts it in the speech under consideration, the inescapable need is for

the people to “supervise power [监督权利 *jiandu quanli*]” and that power should function “in the sunshine [在阳光下 *zai yangguang xia*]” or transparently (Xi 2022b, 3).

However, the main focus in this speech is on how democratic supervision relates to the rule of law. There are two main dimensions: on the one hand, power should be controlled by the “cage of institutions” and driven by the “reins of the rule of law”; on the other hand, oversight power needs to function “in accordance with the law.” The two are obviously related: if supervision is embodied in rule of law, the exercise of supervision must be subject to the rule of law. Thus, oversight is granted to governing bodies by the constitution and the system of laws. This entails that those given such powers must undertake the supervision of the various organs of state power in accordance with the law, but they must also work to ensure that the unity, dignity, and authority of the laws themselves are safeguarded. The best way to do so is to ensure that resolutions, decrees, and laws themselves are implemented in a strict conformity with the law and with transparency.

By now I have moved into the subject matter of the next section, so let me conclude with a personal note. A requirement for foreigners arriving in China is to register with the local public security office. This office is far more than a simple police station. It oversees and supervises all local concerns relating to safety, stability, and harmony. Here residential permits (户口 *hukou*) for Chinese citizens are managed, as well as those for foreigners. Whenever I need to re-register after being away for a while, I return to the local public security office within 24 hours. In large letters on the wall over the reception desk is a motto, which makes the point that everyone who works in the office adheres strictly to the guidelines, duties, and laws to which they are subject in carrying out their tasks. Why make this point? Perhaps more than any other place in the world, they know that they need both to enforce the laws of the state and to follow the laws as to how they should be enacted—with absolute strictness.

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## 8.5 Comprehensively Governing the Country According to Law

Among the many achievements of the decade since 2012, Xi Jinping has arguably made the greatest contribution to developing and strengthening the rule of law, or governing the country according to the rule of law (依法治国 *yifazhiguo*). To set the scene, Xi speaks of upholding rule of law in all respects or comprehensively. The items mentioned are indeed comprehensive, speaking of the path followed, the need for construction, ensuring the spirit of a socialist rule of law, of ensuring that all undertakings and work follow the rule of law, and of promoting social fairness, justice, and human rights within a socialist framework. In short, the agenda over the last decade, from 2012, was to "realise a rule of law transformation [法治化 *fazhihua*] of all work of the state" (Xi 2022b, 2). Since that time, a significant amount of material by Xi Jinping and the CPC Central Committee has been produced, all of it with a resolute focus on seeking to bring about a "rule of law transformation" (Xi 2014a; 2015; 2019; 2021a; 2022a; CPC Central Committee 2014; 2021).[9]

### 8.5.1 From Legal System to Rule of Law

In order to understand these developments, some longer historical background is needed (Boer 2021, 209–216). Three terms indicate three periods in the development of rule of law. The first is "legal system [法制 *fazhi*]," which was found in the preamble to the constitution up until 2018: "improve and perfect the socialist legal system [健全社会主义法制 *jianquan shehuizhuyi fazhi*]." Given the term's ancient pedigree,[10] it has a fully developed semantic field, with three main senses: its widest meaning refers to all the laws (written and unwritten) of a state and the many political, economic, and cultural components; its more restricted sense designates a legal system and a legal order; and its narrowest meaning refers to the legal system itself (法律制度 *falü zhidu*). The most common usage understands the term in this narrow sense, with two dimensions. The first is a more static meaning, with reference to the existing laws and regulations of a country; and the second is a dynamic sense, which includes the formulation of legislation, revision, enforcement, and supervision (Xia and Chen 2009, 560). Clearly, "legal system" is rich in meaning and practice in China, and it should be no surprise that this term appeared in the constitution and was emphasised by earlier leaders, especially Deng Xiaoping.

However, in 2018 the constitution was amended and the phrase in question became: “improve and perfect the socialist rule of law [健全社会主义法治 *jianquan shehuizhuyi fazhi*].” Why the change? Surely the fully-rounded “legal system” was enough. At this point another term becomes important, marking another distinct period: “rule of a person [人治 *renzhi*].” The period in question is the disruptive decade of the “Cultural Revolution,” during which the “two whatevers [两个凡是 *liang ge fanshi*]” came to dominate: “we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave.” Proposed by the circles around the Gang of Four soon after Mao’s death,[11] the “two whatevers” embody—somewhat paradoxically for communists—a tendency in Confucianism to emphasise that all depends on the will of the virtuous ruler.[12] This notion that “a person of virtue rules the country [贤人治国 *xianren zhiguo*]” came to be known as “rule of a person.”[13] As debate developed around the problem after the tumultuous decade, it became clear that a legal system on its own was not sufficient, for it could be used by a small group or a person to advance their own agenda. Indeed, it was during this debate that “legal system” also gained the connotation of “rule by law.”

In this context the third term came to the fore: rule of law (法治 *fazhi*). Since I have dealt elsewhere with the immense debates of the late 1980s and especially the 1990s (Boer 2021, 212–214), I do not need to repeat that material here, save to point out that the conclusion reached was as follows: a legal system requires a rule of law to prevent the former’s deployment under rule by a person.[14] More positively, rule of law provides the framework, goal, and value of the legal system, while the legal system is the concrete embodiment and thus foundation of the rule of law (He and Qi 2018, 11).

### 8.5.2 The “Two Combinations” and Rule of Virtue

We are now in the territory of governing the country according to the rule of law, but as a way into the material from Xi’s speech, let me introduce what are known as the “two combinations [两个结合 *liang ge jiehe*].” This has been a notable emphasis for the last decade but was succinctly formulated recently as “the basic principles of Marxism combined with China’s concrete practice, and combined with China’s fine traditional culture” (Xi

2021b, 13). There are two dialectically related features of this definition (Zhang and Zhang 2021; Sun 2021). The first is in terms of the basic principles of Marxism and the specific conclusions in light of concrete conditions in China (Mao 1959). This has been an emphasis since the 1930s, with the development of the approach that there is no such thing as abstract Marxism (for then it would empty of content), and there is no singular template that can be used in all situations; instead the only valid Marxism is concrete Marxism in light of the specific and practical characteristics of the local situation (Mao 1938, 658–659). The second addresses directly the relationship between Marxism and China's traditional culture. Obviously, this process is connected with the first combination, since the concrete conditions in China are also influenced deeply by the long political and cultural tradition.[15] This interaction operates not in terms of an opposition between the one and the other (which used to be a more common assumption), not in the sense of a balance or mean, and not the selection of a few desirable items from the tradition that may be of use today (although the final option is occasionally a risk). Instead, the process is envisaged in a dialectical manner, in which the traditional culture is sublated (扬弃 *yangqi*, the Chinese translation of *Aufhebung*) in the framework of Marxism, while Marxism itself is enriched. As Xu (2021, 344) puts it, this dialectical process ensures that "China's fine traditional culture is full of vitality."

The reason for introducing this distinction here is that it assists in explaining two developments with regard to the rule of law. To begin with, the rule of law in China is not the same as rule of law in capitalist countries. True, the term itself was initially borrowed from Western discourse, but has undergone a thorough process of reinterpretation in light of Marxism and the concrete conditions in China. In short, it is a socialist rule of law that arises from China's socialist system and strengthens that system. Further, it entails a creative and dialectical engagement with China's traditional approach to law. Obviously, one aspect concerns developments of that tradition's legal system, but I would like to emphasise another feature here: the rule of virtue (德治 *dezhi*). A long history lies behind this concept, relating to the two traditions of Legalism (法家 *fajia*) and Confucianism (儒家 *rujia*), but the agreed resolution came with Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), who was crucial for establishing Confucianism during the Han

Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE). He did so by means of a significant dialectical move, drawing on the Daoist tradition of yin-yang: the positive yang is virtue and the negative yin is punishment. While "virtue is more vital than punishment," it is vain to imagine that we can dispense with the sanction of law (He 2015, 36–38). Since the time of Jiang Zemin(2000, 91), rule of law began to be seen in terms of both law and virtue. As Xi Jinping observed at the beginning of his tenure: "law is written morality [道德 *daode*], while morality is inner [内心 *neixin*] law." For this reason, "we should persist in the combination of ruling the country according to law [依法治国 *yifazhiguo*] and ruling the country according to virtue [依德治国 *yidezhiguo*]" (Xi 2012b, 141).

### 8.5.3 Strengthening the Constitution

Returning to the speech under analysis and its program for the future, the first and in many ways most substantial point concerns the constitution. As is his wont, Xi begins with a quotation from the Chinese tradition: "The law is both the balance of the state and the yardstick of time" (Wu J. 2007, 63). It comes from the Tang Dynasty's Wu Jing (670–749 CE), in the *Gongping* section of his work *Zhenguan zhengyao*. Again, the quotation from the tradition sets the longer context for a treatment of the constitution, concerning which I would like to emphasise four items.

First, the constitution has the highest dignity and authority, and it needs to be safeguarded and implemented. No surprises here, for this is the role of constitutions. With the second item we move into more specific features of a socialist constitution. Xi emphasises that the constitution embodies the will of both the Party and the people. "I have stressed many times," says Xi, that "to safeguard" and "to defend" the constitution's authority and dignity is to safeguard and defend the authority and dignity of "the common will [共同意志 *gongtong yizhi*] of the Party and the people" (Xi 2022b, 2). We may understand this dual emphasis in a number of ways. To begin with, it reflects the mass line (see above) in which the line connecting the Party and the people is ensured through the constitution itself. But it is more than this, for the phrase used is the "common will [共同意志 *gongtong yizhi*]" of Party and people. The will or heart of the people we have discussed, but here the Party also comes to the fore. This is not to be seen in a typical Western either-or, but in terms of a Marxist—and indeed Chinese Marxist—

framework of both-and. Thus, the constitution expresses, embodies, and provides the foundation for this common will.

Does this mean mean that the Communist Party too is subject to the constitution? The answer should be obvious: “No organisation or individual has the privilege of transcending the constitution and laws, and all acts that violate the constitution and laws must be investigated and redressed” (Xi 2022b, 2). This is by no means the first time that Xi has made this point (Xi 2014b, 114–115; 2014d, 122–123; 2017a, 16; 2017b, 41), but he makes the point even more clearly a few sentences later. While the Party leads in terms upholding and enacting the constitution, “the Party itself must act within the scope of the constitution and laws” (Xi 2022b, 3). This clarity dispels an oft-misunderstood feature of China’s constitutional rule of law: the very fact that the leadership of the Communist Party is embodied in the constitution means not that the Party is in some way above the law. Instead, every member of the Communist Party—like everyone else in China—is subject to the constitution and thus rule of law. This reality is in fact more rigorous than one will find elsewhere, for everything must be done in “strict accordance [严格依照 *yange yizhao*]” with the constitution (Xi 2022b, 3). A further question: does being subject to the rule of law mean that the leadership of the Party is in some way weakened? It would be so within an either-or framework typical of Western countries, but not in Chinese Marxism. As Xi observes a little earlier, at a Central Committee working conference on ruling the country according to the rule of law (November 2020), this does not mean weakening the Party’s leadership, but strengthening it. The reason: such leadership is the soul of a socialist rule of law (Xi 2021a, 1–2).

Finally, the constitution is the foundation of rule of law. Again, an obvious point but with a specific emphasis: this is a socialist constitution and China is—to translate literally—a “socialist rule-of-law country” (Xi 2022b, 2). Everything turns on this crucial point: a socialist constitution and its rule of law arises from and strengthens the socialist system. To construct such a system requires learning from other socialist countries, comparing with capitalist countries, but certainly not copying a template that would be an ill fit in China’s concrete conditions. To develop such a constitution requires a long process of construction, as well as adaptation to changing circumstances. The worst option would be to inscribe a constitution

—“constitutionalism [宪政 *xianzheng*]—that is virtually unchangeable (Xi 2021a, 2).

### 8.5.4 Good Laws

Concerning virtuous or good laws, there is not one, but two quotations: “When the law of the land under heaven is good, there will be order in the land under heaven; when the laws of the state are good, there will be order in the state” (Wang 2016, 869).[16] And: “The law did come from under heaven, and it did not arise from earth, but it originated from the human world and conforms with the human heart.”[17] The first quotation comes from a text by Wang Anshi (1021–1086 CE) of the Northern Song Dynasty, although he attributes the insight to the fabled Duke of Zhou. Of interest here is the term 善法 *shanfa*, with 善 *shan* indicating what is good, virtuous, and apt. The aim is, then, to develop laws that are of this nature. The second quotation is drawn from the recovered fragments of works by Shenzi, birth name Shen Dao (c. 350—c. 275 BCE), from the Warring States period.[18] Although Shenzi is at times described as a “Legalist,” in light of his influence on Han Fei, he is also seen as a precursor to the codification of Daoism with Laozi. In this case, the quotation indicates that the law is neither a product of the heavens or indeed of the ancient gods, nor is it autochthonous; instead, the law is a product of human societies, with the ideal that it should be in line with or conform to the human heart or mind. At the same time, the conjunction of two quotations, one emphasising the virtuous good of the law and the other its impartiality in light of human societies, may be seen as yet another conjunction of the Confucian and Legalist traditions that have been seen as necessary for good governance ever since Dong Zhongshu’s dialectical connection between the two (see above).

A few further points are worth noting, beginning with the claim that the construction of a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics is a remarkable achievement in legal history. Xi specifies that this task has been underway for the last 30 years or more, which means that the serious work did not begin until the early 1990s. Obviously, this process began somewhat after the launch of the reform and opening-up in 1978, but it does accord with the immense debates of the 1990s around rule of law and legal system (see above). Deng Xiaoping may have urged the construction of socialist

legal system as well as rule of law, but concrete efforts began only after he stepped aside in his 90s. The debates, of course, indicate that the construction process was underway, and I can attest from the immense amount of research material being produced today that the work continues. By why is it a significant achievement? It was a wholesale effort to construct a system of laws that were influenced by the Chinese tradition but were framed in terms of socialism. Many are the components of such a system and it would take me far afield to analyse them each here (Li 2022b, 30–31).[19] So let me focus on two big-picture phrases, apart from noting the key roles of the leadership of the Communist Party and the people as masters of the country.

The first concerns the "incorporation of core socialist values [社会主义核心价值观 *shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*] into legislation" (Xi 2022b, 3). These values are—at least in China—extremely well known, having been assiduously promoted as a set of positive and society-wide values or virtues in the last half decade. The values are: prosperity and strength (富强 *fuqiang*); democracy (民主 *minzhu*); civilisation (文明 *wenming*); harmony (和谐 *hexie*); freedom (自由 *ziyou*); equality (平等 *pingdeng*); justice (公正 *gongzheng*); rule of law (法治 *fazhi*); love of country (爱国 *aiguo*); dedication to one's work or study (敬业 *jingye*); honesty and trustworthiness (诚信 *chengxin*); and friendship (友善 *youshan*). After the key statement by the CPC Central Committee (2013), there was some debate as to whether at least some of these values were sufficiently socialist, since some could be read in a Western liberal framework. Further studies sought to identify the overall socialist context of the values, which determines their nature and emphasis (Tao 2014; Bu 2016; Han and Zhang 2018, 109–222). In terms of my concerns here is the fact that these values are not merely social or cultural values that should in some way be fostered, but that they should be embodied in the legal system itself. In this respect, these legal values clearly fall on the side of good and virtuous laws (善法 *shanfa*), marking a notable shift to emphasising the core socialist values as a positive complement to the resolute focus on eradicating corruption. Of course, the latter is a continual task, in terms of strict law enforcement for wrongdoing, but it is only half of the task; in a Chinese Marxist context the 善法 *shanfa* is also needed.

The second socialist feature is here expressed in terms of developing a legal system that "meets the people's ever-growing needs for a better life [美好生活 *meihao shenghuo*]" (Xi 2022b, 3)—or, more literally, a "beautiful and good life." With a focus on a democracy that arises from people's real needs (Fan 2021, 5), this is an allusion to the now famous identification of new primary contradiction at the CPC's Nineteenth Congress in 2017: "What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a beautiful and good life [美好生活 *meihao shenghuo*]" (Xi 2017a, 8). As only the third primary contradiction since liberation and the founding of the New China (Boer 2021, 76–77), it now sets the framework for all policy and how to deal with the many secondary contradictions.

By now we can go a step or two further: not only does the phrase a "better life" or a "beautiful and good life" express the Marxist approach to human rights, in which the right to socio-economic well-being is the core right, but it is also increasingly expressed in the policy of "common prosperity." While we can trace the concept back to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping (Mao 1955, 496; Deng 1986a, 171–172), it was Xi Jinping, already from the early days after his election as General Secretary of the CPC, who came to place a resolute emphasis on common prosperity, which is "the fundamental principle of Chinese socialism—this is why we must ensure that all the people share the fruits of development in a fair way, and move steadily towards common prosperity [共同富裕 *gongtong fuyu]"* (Xi 2012a, 13). However, a whole new phase of the project of common prosperity began with the publication of a talk originally given at the tenth session of the CPC's Financial and Economic Commission, on 17 August, 2021. It was subsequently published in part in *Qiushi* in October 2021 and is entitled "Make Solid Progress in Promoting Common Prosperity" (Xi 2021c). The article reiterates Deng Xiaoping's point that poverty is by no means socialism, and that with the overcoming of absolute poverty and the achievement by 2021 of a 小康 *xiaokang*—moderately well-off, peaceful, healthy, and stable—society, the time had come to begin the serious work of promoting common prosperity. Many are the points made in this article, with concerns for all of the aspects required for attaining common prosperity, but let me quote the following:

> Common prosperity is the essential requirement of socialism and an important feature of Chinese-style modernisation. When we talk about common prosperity, we mean the common prosperity of all the people, the material and spiritual well-being of the people, not the prosperity of a few people, nor uniform egalitarianism … Common prosperity is a long-term goal, which requires a process and cannot be achieved overnight … just like completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, common prosperity for all is a general concept that applies to the whole of society (Xi 2021c, 2, 3, 5).

The goal of common prosperity is, of course, communism, since a country needs a very high level of such prosperity shared by all to make the transition to communism. To provide a legal framework for such a project would certainly be the first time in human history.

### 8.5.5 Law at Home and Abroad

The lengthy treatment of the legal system is also notable for emphasising that the improvement and strengthening of the legal system is needed both at home and abroad. Obviously, a robust and modernised legal system is an inescapable component for a country itself, and we can find this emphasis from the earliest days of the New China. But what does the concern with Chinese law in an international context mean? Here are the crucial sentences:

> We should promote in a coordinated way internal rule of law and rule of law relating to foreign affairs [涉外法治 *shewai fazhi*], and coordinate both development and security. We should promote the construction of a legal system for the extraterritorial application of Chinese law, use the rule of law approach effectively to respond to challenges and guard against risks, and to safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development (Xi 2022b, 3; see also 2021a, 5).

Many are the dimensions to this clear concern. Most obvious is the need for both rule of law and the legal system for the vast number of foreign companies and individuals who engage with, work, and domicile in China. Further, there are situations where Chinese law is applicable in international

settings—as the second sentence quoted above indicates. These include the protection, and compliance with the law by, the many state-owned and non-public companies working on international projects, Chinese citizens in international settings, and Chinese interests where they are subject to unilateral and unlawful restriction and interference. Important here too are measures introduced—and recently enhanced at the 2022 "Two Sessions"—to provide a robust legal framework for protecting Chinese companies and individuals subjected to the "sanctions fever" that has afflicted the United States and its few Western "friends." It is one thing to forbid companies from complying with unilateral and illegal sanctions; it is quite another to provide a legal framework to enable them to do so.

To return to the first sentence quoted: promoting the rule of law in relation to foreign affairs (涉外法治 *shewai fazhi*) is a very deliberate choice of words, for it refers not to the spread or imposition of a Chinese rule of law in an international context; instead, it refers to need to develop further international rule of law through engagement with other countries on an equal footing. When China engages internationally on such matters, it uses a clear and deliberate phrase: "an international order based on international law [以国际法为基础的国际秩序 *yi guojifa wei jichu de guoji zhixu*]."[20] This is in contrast to the "rules-based international order," which are "rules formulated by a few countries [少数国家制定的规则 *shaoshu guojia xhiding de guize*]" led by the United States. To suggest that China wishes to impose its law on others would be a case of—as the saying goes—of a thief thinking that everyone else steals. Instead, the purpose is to develop an international framework in which every country contributes as equals.

Finally, Xi alludes—in his earlier treatment of the constitution—to the landmark 2021 National Security Law in relation to Hong Kong SAR. The observations speak of Special Administrative Regions (特别行政区 *tebie xingzhengqu*), but the principal reference is to HKSAR in light of recent events. Since I will address this issue in Chap. 10, I quote the relevant section here:

> We need to improve the legal system whereby the central authorities exercises overall governance power over the SARs in accordance with the constitution and basic laws of SARs, perfect the systems and mechanisms needed for the implementation of the constitution

> and the basic laws of the SARs, and safeguard the constitutional and legal order of SARs as set forth in the constitution and the SAR basic laws (Xi 2022b, 3).

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## 8.6 Leadership of the Communist Party

The third major emphasis of the speech concerns the leadership of the Communist Party. Although this leadership resonates throughout the speech as a whole, I focus on two sections where this leadership is the specific topic under discussion: one referring to the initial project from CPC's Eighteenth National Congress and the other to the tasks at hand today.

### 8.6.1 Statutory Procedures

Let me begin with a full quotation of the initial point with reference to the policies since the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress, since it gives a sense of how comprehensive and multi-layered this leadership is.

> We must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China. We will uphold the Party's core leading role in assuming overall responsibility of the situation as a whole and coordinating all sides, resolutely safeguard the Central Committee's authority and its centralised and unified leadership, ensure that the Party's theories, lines, principles, policies, and decisions are comprehensively carried out and effectively implemented in all aspects of the state's work, and support and ensure that the organs of state power energetically take the initiative, are responsibly independent, and are coordinated in carrying out their work in accordance with the constitution and laws. We should strengthen and improve the Party's leadership, excel in working through statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*] so that the Party's propositions become the will of the state, excel in working through statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*] so that candidates recommended by Party organisations become the leading personnel of the organs of state power, and excel in working through the organs of state power [通过国家政权机关 *tongguo guojia zhengquan jiguan*] in implementing the Party's leadership of state and society—so as to safeguard the authority of the Party and of the state, and ensure that

> the whole Party and the whole country unite as one [团结统一 *tuanjie tongyi*] (Xi 2022b, 2).

Comprehensive leadership is clearly the emphasis of the initial part of this quotation, but I am interested here in the threefold emphasis in its second part, for which I have also provided the Chinese text. Xi speaks of working through "statutory procedures," in relation to Party proposals and candidates recommended by Party organisations, and of working through the organs of state power. Why? These proposals and candidates are not simply imposed by fiat, for this would be counter-productive in terms of ensuring that the Party and people "unite as one"—as the well-known phrase puts it. Instead, an extraordinarily full range of institutional structures, of statutory procedures, must be deployed so as to garner criticism and gain approval from the people. When we turn to the tasks at hand (from the second set of six points), the concern is to strengthen the system of people's congresses so that this crucial institutional structure can play a key role in the statutory procedures. In this respect, Xi speaks not merely of the Party working hard to ensure that the people's congresses improve their structures and meaningful democratic practice, but also of the need for congress delegates and Party cadres to strengthen their cooperation and coordination. The terms used used here—协调 *xietiao* and 配合 *peihe*—connote harmonious and proportional combination or arrangement, with the outcome being a large and powerful "harmonious force [强大合力 *qiangda heli*]." It is in this sense that the people's congresses are to be a "systemic carrier [制度载体 *zhidu zaiti*]" or vehicle of the Party's leadership (Xi 2022b, 4).

Notably, a comparable emphasis is found in proposals for safeguarding the people as masters and ensuring that all state power belongs to the people (Zhang 2021). This is to be done through systemic strength and improvement. The terms used are telling. The text mentions "systemic structures [制度体系 *zhidu tixi*]," of the need for state power to "pass through" or go "by means of [通过 *tongguo*]" the people's congresses, of the need to widen "democratic channels [民主渠道 *minzhu qudao*]," of the "comprehensive democratic system [全民主制度 *quan minzhu zhidu*]" (Xi 2022b, 2) To ensure channels for meaningful and productive democratic

engagement requires long-term systemic construction; so also with the leadership of the Communist Party.

In many respects, an overall concern of the speech is to identify many of the structures concerned with the statutory procedures of Party leadership and people's democracy: the constitution, rule of law, legal system, people's congresses, mass line, and organs of state power. Xi also mentions—later—the dialectical interaction of electoral and consultative democracy, direct and indirect elections, process and results. In its totality, this an extraordinarily comprehensive process through which Party leadership works in relation to people's democracy.[21]

### 8.6.2 Democratic Centralism

All of this brings us to democratic centralism. Elsewhere, I have dealt at some length with the history of democratic centralism (Boer 2021, 248–257), so I provide here a summary of that earlier material. We may identify two levels of democratic centralism, which are both distinct and related: democratic centralism in terms of the Party's own functioning; and democratic centralism as a method of country-wide governance. While the former has become an established and well-honed practice by Communist Parties since the early twentieth century, the problem has been one of finding ways to make democratic centralism work for country-wide governance.

In a Chinese context, the effort to find a way began with Deng Xiaoping's proposal (1986b, 177) that the CPC's "functions should be separated [分开 *fenkai*] from those of the government." In other words, the government of the country, embodied in the many levels of people's congresses and people's political consultative conferences, would become separated from the role of the CPC. Deng was responding to the aberration of the "Cultural Revolution" when "rule of a person" prevailed (see above). While Jiang Zemin (2002, 553) would take this a step further in emphasising the components of socialist democracy and the crucial role of a socialist rule of law as the way to ensure the mutual role of CPC leadership and socialist democracy, it fell to Hu Jintao to spell out exactly what this meant. One of Hu Jintao's most important points was the need for "the Party's proposals to become the will of the country through statutory procedures [法定程序 *fading chengxu*]" (Hu 2007, 13). Five years later he explained further: the "basic strategy by which the party leads the people in

governing the country is through governing the country according to law [依法治国 *yifa zhiguo*]' (Hu 2012, 9).

This brief history picks up some of the points I have discussed earlier, especially rule of law and statutory procedures as necessary features of the Party's indirect leadership, but the question remains: what bearing do they have on democratic centralism? This has been one of Xi Jinping's major contributions, seeking to clarify the need for rule-of-law statutory procedures in the practice of Party leadership (Xi 2012b, 142; 2015, 17; 2019, 3). When Party proposals become state laws, "the implementation of the law is the implementation of the Party's will, and the implementation of the Party's policies is to act in accordance with the law" (Xi 2015, 18). This entails that the organs of state power are independent, proactive, and responsible in terms of adhering to the constitution and law. The explicit connection with democratic centralism was already made a decade ago:

> Adhering to the principle of democratic centralism, the system of state power and the standards of actions defined in the constitution, we should exercise state power through the people's congresses, ensure that decision-making power, executive power, and oversight power function independently but are coordinated with each other, ensure that government agencies exercise their power and perform their duties in accordance with statutory mandates and procedures [法定权限和程序 *fading quanxian he chengxu*], and ensure that government agencies organise all undertakings concertedly and effectively (Xi 2012b, 139; see also 2014c, 290).[22]

Later in the same text, Xi speaks of democratic centralism in terms of the "foundational [基本 *jiben*]" way of "exercising power according to law [依法执政 *yifa zhizheng*]" and "governing the country according to law [依法治国 *yifa zhiguo*]' (Xi 2012b, 142). Note the date of this text: it was initially delivered in 2012, at a thirtieth anniversary celebration of the 1982 constitution. Xi Jinping has been focused on developing and strengthening China's democratic system from the earliest days of his tenure as general secretary.

Back to the present and the main text under analysis. Thus far, my brief account of the development of democratic centralism as a distinct form of country-wide governance has tended to focus on the mediating structures,

on the rule of law statutory procedures that connect the CPC and the people's will. When we turn to the speech concerning whole process people's democracy, the focus is more on the democratic processes of the people's congresses. Xi speaks of exercising state power in an integrated way "through the people's congresses [通过人民代表大会 *tongguo renmin daibiao dahui*]," and that the congresses at all of the five levels are "democratically elected, responsible to the people, and subject to the people's supervision." At the next level, the organs—administrative, supervisory, judicial, and procuratorial—created by the people's congresses are responsible to and supervised by congresses—all of them "in accordance with statutory mandates and procedures [依照法定权限和程序 *yizhao fading quanxian he chengxu*]." And to develop democracy further at a local level, it is important to "give full play to local initiative and enthusiasm" so that democratic engagement is robust and productive (Xi 2022b, 2).

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## 8.7 Conclusion: People's Democracy is the Life of Socialism

We may now define socialist democracy, or whole process people's democracy: it is a dialectical conjunction of Communist Party leadership and the people as masters of the country, mediated through the full range or "whole process [全过程 *quan guocheng*]" of democratic and rule-of-law statutory procedures (Kuai 2021, 71; Zhang 2022, 74–75).

### 8.7.1 Defining Democracy

More fully, in what is already a famous definition of whole process people's democracy, it has not only "integrated systemic procedures," but also fully integrated "participatory practices." In other words, this democracy in China has realised the unity of "democratic process and results, democratic procedure and substance, direct and indirect democracy, and people's democracy and the will of the state."[23] In even more detail it includes: the people's democratic dictatorship of workers and farmers; people's congresses; multi-party consultation and cooperation with eight other political parties; minority nationalities' autonomous regions; base-level (grassroots) democratic self-government by the masses; and many other

foundational governance structures. Through this comprehensive and integrated system of governance, we find the “interlocking chain” of elections, consultation, decision-making, management, and supervision—in relation to state, economic, social, and cultural affairs (Kuai 2021, 73–75; Cheng 2022; Li 2022b, 28). In sum, this means that such a democracy is “full-chain, all-dimensional, and all-encompassing,” and is “the most extensive, authentic, and effective socialist democracy” (Xi 2022b, 5).

### 8.7.2 Evaluating Democracy

What has been presented in this chapter is a democratic system that is well on the way to full realisation. But who is to evaluate whether it is democratic or not? The few countries of the world that make up the West have become accustomed in the last century or so to using their own capitalist democracies as a yardstick to judge others. Not only is this system by now rather crude, but it has also clearly stagnated, fragmented, and is now riven with systemic and intractable divisions (Fan 2021, 5–6; Liu 2022, 17–19). It is hardly appropriate to use such a system to assess others, not least because it arose in a specific context—Europe and some of its colonies—and is thereby an ill fit indeed for other parts of the world, let alone socialist countries. A more scientific and indeed democratic type of assessment is as follows:

> The evaluation as to whether a country’s political system is democratic and effective depends mainly on whether the country’s leadership can be replaced in an orderly manner and according to law, whether all the people can manage state and social affairs, as well as economic and cultural undertakings, according to law, whether the masses can voice their interests without impediment, whether all sectors of society can participate effectively in a country’s political life, and whether a country’s decision-making can become more scientific [科学化 *kexuehua*] and more democratic [民主化 *minzhuhua*]. It depends on whether all types of talents can enter the country’s leadership and governing system through fair competition, whether the ruling party can realise the leadership of state affairs in accordance with the constitution and legal provisions, and whether the use of power can be effectively restricted and supervised (Xi 2022b, 4).

Note carefully what has happened with the articulation of these criteria: they move a step beyond the position that "only the wearer knows if the shoe fits or not" (Xi 2013, 273), that the country's concrete conditions profoundly influence the nature of its governing system. To be sure, Xi often makes this point as well, but here he seeks to take assessment to a whole new level.[24] These are criteria that can be used to assess all democratic systems throughout human history.[25]

### 8.7.3 People's Democracy is the Life of Socialism

A major reason for offering scientific criteria for assessing democracy is the well-argued position that socialist democracy is superior to capitalist democracy (Fang and Zhou 2010; Sun 2010; Yang 2017; Jin and Tao 2018; Xin 2019; Li 2022b, 29). This "value function [价值功能 *jiazhi gongneng*]"—as it is known (Wang and Guo 2022, 160)—is due to "adhering to the socialist path of political development," which entails the threefold leadership of the Communist Party, the people as masters of the country, and governing the country according to the rule of law—the three main sections of this chapter (Xi 2022b, 2). As Xi observed already in 2014 and repeats here: "People's democracy is the life of socialism." Further, "without democracy, there can be no socialism, no socialist modernisation, and no great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Xi 2014f, 5; 2022b, 5). As we have seen, this entails that the people are masters of the country, that the will or heart of the masses is manifested in the democratic system, that their rights and interests are protected, and that their vitality and creativity is fostered.

I would like to conclude by mentioning a theme to which I will return in the next chapter: stability (稳定 *wending*). On a number of occasions, Xi observes that a "stable system means a stable country [国家稳 *guojia wen*]," of the need for "long-term social stability [稳定 *wending*]," and of the effect of "institutionalisation, standardisation, and proceduralisation of socialist democratic politics" so as to provide a vastly "improved systemic guarantee for the growth and flourishing [兴旺发达 *xingwangfada*] of the Party and the country," which will provide a "long period of peace and order [长治久安 *changzhi jiu'an*]" (Xi 2022b, 2, 5). Socialist democracy is certainly not interested in the chaos of antagonistic politics,[26] for its focus and aim is the well-being of the people, for which long-term stability is

needed (Fan 2021, 9–10). It hardly needs to be pointed out that this is always a work in progress, with specialists constantly making proposals for improvement (Kuai 2021, 77–78; Li 2022b, 32–36; Xi 2022a) in light of the need to "keep on developing and advancing with the passing of time [与时俱进 *yushi-jujin*]" (Xi 2022b, 3).

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# Footnotes

1 At the time of writing, an English translation has not yet appeared, although it can be expected in the English-language version of *Qiushi*. Closely associated with the speech was a full white paper published by the State Council Information Office of the PRC in December of 2021 (SCIO 2021a; 2021b). Scholarship on the concept and its practice is growing exponentially, but see the useful survey by Wang and Guo (2022) on what scholarship has been published thus far, its shortcomings, and suggestions for deepening research.

2 According to Wang and Guo (2022, 150), the term was first used in November of 2019, at a visit to the Hongqiao sub-district (Shanghai) grassroots contact point meeting for people's congress legislation: "people's democracy is a type of whole process people's democracy, and all important legislative decisions are brought about according to due process [依照程序 *yizhao chengxu*], democratic deliberation, and scientific and democratic policy-making." The term would subsequently appear in a number of official documents and the now famous speech at the centenary of the CPC (Xi 2021b, 5). These grassroots contact points have been developing for some time: since 2014, they have been established as a three-level system at national, provincial, and city (including autonomous prefectures) levels, with panels, feasibility studies, hearings, and so on, in order to garner base-level proposals and feedback for legislation.

3 For an overview of debates and developments in China from the Republican Revolution through to the Communist Revolution, see Liu (2022, 15–16).

4 It is beyond my remit here to analyse the scholarship on the shift from the dictatorship of the proletariat to democratic dictatorship, but readers may usefully consult some key scholarship on the question (Zhang 1983; Huang and Yan 2004; Tang 2005; Luo 2009; Jin and Li 2019).

5 I have dealt with this material in an earlier work (Boer 2021, 244–251), and cite here only the key texts from Mao Zedong (Mao 1940b; 1940a; 1949a; 1949b; 1962, 290–298).

6 The original—which has been adapted slightly in Xi's quotation—may be found in 《代吕晦叔应诏疏》 *Dai Lühui shu yingzhao shu.* It is available in many forms, but see https://www.miaosong.cn/baike/230557.html and in the first volume of *Yichuan xiansheng wenji* (Cheng 1920).

7 The most grassroots level includes people's congresses in villages, minority nationality townships, and towns, while the next level up includes cities not sub-divided, municipal districts, counties, and autonomous counties.

8 That whole process people's democracy emerges from the mass line is the argument of Qi (2021).

9 In relation to the final item cited, the CPC Central Committee published a major statement in late 2020, entitled *A Construction Plan for Rule of Law in China (2020–2025)*. One may also find the most important points of this plan available on many internet sites, such as http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/10/content_5578659.htm.

10 The term already appears in the *Yueling* chapter of the *Book of Rites*, compiled in the third to second centuries BCE: "restore the legal system [修法制 *xiu fazhi*]." For more examples of early usage, see He and Qi (2018, 7).

11 The "two whatevers" were proposed in an editorial entitled "Study the Documents Well and Grasp the Key Link." It appeared simultaneously on 7 February, 1977, in three newspapers: *Renmin Ribao, Hongqi and Jiefangjun Bao*. It may be found at www.wendangku.net/doc/bd9fab3f27284b73f24250fc.html.

12 As the *Zhongyong* section of the *Book of Rites* puts it, "governance depends on a human being [为政在人 *weizheng zairen*]"; indeed, "if a person exists, the government will flourish; if a person dies, the government will cease." The Chinese text may be found at ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong.

13 Three key quotations indicate what was at issue. Deng Xiaoping: "Neither Marx nor Engels put forward any 'whatever' doctrine, nor did Lenin or Stalin, nor did Comrade Mao Zedong himself" (Deng 1977a, 38; 1977b, 51). A year later: "Democracy has to be institutionalised and written into law, so as to make sure that institutions and laws do not change whenever the leadership [领导人 *lingdaoren*] changes, or whenever the leaders change their views or shift the focus of their attention" (Deng 1978a, 156; 1978b, 146). Finally: "through the reform, we intend to straighten out the relationship between the rule of law [法治 *fazhi*] and the rule of a person [人治 *renzhi*]" (Deng 1986b, 177; 1986c, 178–179).

14 Note here Xi Jinping's (2015, 12) observation: "The rule of law and the rule of a person is a basic problem in the history of human political civilisation, and also a major problem that all countries must face and solve in the process of modernisation. Looking at the modern history of the world, no country that has successfully realised modernisation has failed to solve the problems of the rule of

law and the rule of a person. On the contrary, although some countries achieved rapid development for a time, they did not reach the threshold of modernisation smoothly, but fell into one or another 'trap', resulting in stagnation or even retrogression in economic and social development. The latter situation is largely related to the lack of rule of law.".

15 The deep influence of China's long tradition of governance, with a distinct focus on what may be transformed and raised to a new level in light of Marxism, is the emphasis of a study by Liu (2021).

16 This is not the first time Xi has quoted this text (Xi 2014b, 117; 2014d, 127).

17 This text may be found at https://ctext.org/shenzi/yi-wen.

18 The fragments have been pieced together from quotations in other works, along with bamboo slips discovered in excavations of the first millennium BCE state of Chu.

19 For example, since 2012—merely a decade—there have been amendments to the Constitution, 48 laws have been enacted, 203 laws revised, legal interpretations given in nine cases, and 79 major legal issues have had decisions adopted. By 2021, there were 282 effective laws, 608 administrative regulations and more than 12,000 local regulations. And a civil code was proposed and adopted (Xi 2021a, 3–4).

20 This phrase came to international attention in the now famous speech by Yang Jiechi, director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, at the China-US summit in Alaska on 18 March, 2021. See https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/202103/t20210319_9604437.shtml.

21 The summary by Ma Yide (2017, 31) is worth quoting here: "First, the Party's leadership is political leadership, and the Party's views are a combination of historical and practical legitimacy based on multi-party cooperation and political consultation. Second, the Party's views, which have solid legitimacy, are transformed into the will of the state through people's congresses, and the concrete expression of the will of the state is democratic legislation. During this process, the people re-examine and substantiate the Party's views through the system of people's congresses. Third, as the legal procedure for transforming the will of the Party, democratic legislation constitutes the basis for governing the country according to law, and is the governance basis for the direct links between the modern state and citizens. Fourth, the leadership of the Party should advance with the times through consultations between the Party and the masses and social consultation, thereby entering the logical chain of direct governance consisting of legitimization of the Party's views and their

transformation into the will of the state and thence into the rule of law, thus successfully coordinating state governance and social development.”.

22 In subsequent elaborations, Xi connects multi-level consultative democracy with democratic centralism, including minority groups, religions, classes, and overseas Chinese (Xi 2014e, 294, 296; see also Lin 2007).

23 Liu (2022, 21–22) reframes these terms as three dialectical unities: means and ends, form and substance, democratic process and governmental effectiveness.

24 In light of these criteria, we soon find an observation that has been quoted many times around the world. The target of this criticism should be obvious: “If the people are awakened only for voting but enter a dormant period soon after, if they listen only to wildly extravagant claims [天花乱坠 *tianhua luanzhui*] during an election but have no right to speak at all afterwards, if they are favoured only during the canvassing of votes but left out in the cold afterwards, such a democracy is not a genuine democracy” (Xi 2022b, 5). The four-character phrase 天花乱坠 *tianhua luanzhui* means literally flowers cascading from the sky, and thus metaphorically wildly extravagant claims.

25 Historically, we may distinguish between ancient Greek slave-holder democracy, feudal democracy in the sense that it was limited to the aristocracy, capitalist democracy and its degraded sub-forms of illiberal and colonial democracies, and the qualitatively distinct socialist democracy (Zhuo In press; Zhang 2022, 94).

26 As Shang (2020, 14) observes, in a socialist system “the people and the state are not binary opposites; they each have their place within the overall relationship of the political form.”.

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# 9. The People's Will: Stability, Safety, and Harmony in Xinjiang

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## 9.1 Opening Remarks

Arising from the three main themes of the previous chapter—people's will, rule of law, and Communist Party leadership—this chapter provides a case study relating to the people's heart or will as an inescapable feature of socialist democracy. It does so by focusing on a distinctive feature of China's socialist system in terms of the political and cultural assumptions of stability, safety, and harmony, and then analysing the situation in relation to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The first part provides an overview of the semantic fields of stability, safety, and harmony, and then pays more extensive attention to an important CPC Central Committee decision from 2006, entitled *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society*. Coming in the wake of the "wild 90s," the *Decision* analyses the many contradictions that had arisen and provides a full-spectrum policy response that has particular relevance for the many problems in Xinjiang.

The second part of the chapter tackles the situation in Xinjiang, in light of personal experience and scholarship. It begins with a presentation of two geographical features with immense strategic, political, and economic significance: the Hu Huanyong Line and the Hexi Corridor. This material sets the context for overview of the historical development of the

preferential policies for minority nationalities (the Uyghur nationality is one of 55 minorities in China), after which I deal with the main emphases of these policies in terms of culture, education, governance, and economic development. The latter in particular had until recently lagged considerably in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where poverty still remained a distinct problem in remote and rural areas. This leads me to deal with the Marxist approach to human rights, for which the core right is subsistence, socio-economic well-being, and common prosperity. The residual poverty in Xinjiang had provided opportunities for the spread of Islamic radicalism in the 1990s, leading to a rise in terrorism, extremism, and separatism. The response has two related steps: first, a resolute focus in restoring stability, safety, and harmony through anti-terrorist and deradicalisation measures; second, tackling the root cause in terms of economic development, improved job training and opportunities, and education. Here I also address the patterns of growth of Xinjiang's population and the improved choices available to educated and working Uyghur women, as well as the profound effect of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has enabled Xinjiang at last to overcome absolute poverty and set out on the road to common prosperity. Only on the basis of high-quality and balanced development are stability, safety, and harmony possible in the long term.

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## 9.2 Stability, Safety, and Harmony

My first task is to provide a brief overview of the key terms, stability, safety, and harmony, after which I discuss the CPC Central Committee's 2006 *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society*.

### 9.2.1 Stability 稳定 Wending

To begin with some basic meanings. 稳定 *wending* designates stability over a range of phenomena, including physics, emotions, economics, and society. The first character 稳 *wen* has—due its long history—a wide semantic field: steady, stable, firm, composed, and certain, are its core senses. The word also evokes a rich word cluster of single-character synonyms, such as 安 *an*—peace, 平 *ping*—level and thus calm, 固 *gu*—solid, and so on. These can, as one expects with Chinese, be connected with

稳 *wen* in a whole series of two-character words: 平稳 *pingwen*—smooth and steady, 稳固 *wengu*—firm, and 安稳 *anwen*—poised. Not unexpectedly, popular sayings seek to give a fuller meaning to stability, for example, "as stable as Mount Tai [稳如泰山 *wenru Taishan*]," or "let the wind and waves rise while sitting firmly on the fishing boat [任凭风浪起, 稳坐钓鱼船 *renping fenglang qi, wen zuo diaoyuchuan*]."[1] The word can, of course, have negative connotations, in the sense that one is stubborn and indeed dull, and so unable to change with the times. However, the overwhelming sense in a social and cultural framework is that stability is conducive to peace, amicable relations between different groups, and thus well-being.

### 9.2.2 Safety 安全 Anquan

The second key term is 安全 *anquan*, which designates the preventative sense of safety from harm, and thus from social unrest and turmoil, and the proactive sense of protection and preservation. In the latter sense, it can mean that the entirety of humanity lives in harmony with its natural environment, as well as the material and emotional feeling of safety in society, family, and relationships. The preventative and proactive senses are interwoven in Chinese cultural sensibilities. As early as the *Yijing*, in second part of "The Great Treatise [大传 *dazhuan*]" or "Commentary on the Appended Phrases [系辞传 *Xi ci zhuan*]," we find: "Therefore the exemplary person, when resting in safety [安 *an*], does not forget that danger [危 *wei*] may come; when in a state of security [存 *cun*] does not forget the possibility of ruin [亡 *wang*]; and when all is in a state of order [治 *zhi*] does not forget that disorder [乱 *luan*] may come" (Legge 1889, 391).[2] The relations between oppositions are the key: safety cannot be understood without the risk of danger—with 危 *wei* indicating what is dangerous, perilous, and precipitous—and vice versa. So also with 存 *cun* and 亡 *wang*, in terms of surviving and perishing, preservation and ruin, and 治 *zhi* in relation to 乱 *luan*, with the senses of governance and chaos, rule and unrest. So well known is this text that Xi Jinping could cite at the CPC's centenary the well-known four character phrase from this text: "居安思危 *ju'an siwei*," which more literally may be translated as "in times of peace be prepared for danger" (Xi 2021, 17).

The word 安全 *anquan* itself is first attested during the time of the Han Dynasty,[3] and is comprised of two characters, with the ancient 安 *an* including within its semantic field peace, safety, security, and, in adjectival usage, peaceful, tranquil, and quiet. The second character, 全 *quan*, indicates what is complete or intact, and adjectivally speaks of what is whole, entire, or full. At times, 安全 *anquan* is translated as security, and this sense pertains to terms such as "national security [国家安全 *guojia anquan*]," but I have preferred to translate the term generally as "safety," since "security" in English and related Western languages has become twisted and limited in the last couple of decades into the activities of police (public and secret), military, and private security and paramilitary companies. Thus, "safety" provides a more accurate and broad-ranging translation. This is particularly the case with a common term in China, "a feeling of safety [安全感 *anquangan*]," which designates both material and emotional safety in a social context.

### 9.2.3 Harmony 和谐 Hexie

The word "harmony [和谐 *hexie*]" requires more comment. While the character 和 *he* has an extraordinarily rich semantic field, running all the way from the conjunction "and" to senses of peaceful, calm, and thus harmonious, 谐 *xie* tends more in the direction of musical harmony, and even the role of humour in coming to an accord. Due to the importance of the concept in Chinese culture, the cognates and word constructions arising from either character are plentiful indeed. Instead of listing all of these cognates—which include reconciliation, concord, and symmetry—I would like to focus on three topics that elaborate on the understanding of harmony.

To begin with, harmony is a musical metaphor. Tradition has it that the Duke of Zhou (周公 *Zhougong*) was responsible for the skilful blending of both music and rites as a central feature of civilisational order. The *locus classicus* for musical guidelines is to be found in the "Record of Music [乐记 *yueji*]" section of the *Book of Rites* (Hu and Zhang 2017).[4] Here we find the assumed connection between music and rites, and between harmonious music and social order. For example, music comes from the heavens, while rites come from the human world; music comes from within a human being, while rites come from without. The oppositions must constantly work

towards harmonious cooperation, but they can also risk going their own ways and thus signalling disorder. The connection with social order—for both music and rites—is a given. As Gan Chunsong (2019, 217) observes, "a piece of most melodious music should be one that came from a superb synchronisation of different parts, from which was derived the idea that music was conducive to social harmony."

This perception did not arise out of a vacuum: in the early days of the Zhou Dynasty (established in 1045 BCE), social and political contradictions multiplied. Not only were the Zhou seen as usurpers to the Shang, the survivors of which constantly conspired to overthrow the new dynasty, but the various nobles also struggled among themselves for power. Threats from outside came from the north, and society was riven with increasing tensions due to economic inequality. Fearing a constant state of war, the Duke of Zhou sought a way to avoid the fate of the Shang: the concept of social harmony came to be a central policy. And one of the core means for achieving such harmony would be through music and the rites.[5] Much could potentially be quoted from this foundational text, but I would like to emphasise the constant process of seeking harmony in difference. For example:

> Similarity and union are the aim of music; difference and distinction, that of ceremony. From union comes mutual affection; from difference, mutual respect. Where music prevails, we find a weak coalescence; where ceremony prevails, a tendency to separation. It is the business of the two to blend people's feelings and give elegance to their outward manifestations (Hu and Zhang 2017, 975; Legge 1885b, 98).

The step from music to philosophy is easy to make: "The exemplary person seeks harmony but not uniformity," or "agrees but does not echo." These are two possible translations of 君子和而不同 *junzi he er bu tong*, a saying from the *Analects* (1993, 13.23) that sums up a foundational philosophical principle concerning the world.[6] Much has been written concerning the multi-faceted concept of harmony,[7] but I would like to emphasise that it entails not so much smoothing down the sharp corners of differences so as to get along, but rather the combination, unity, and coexistence of distinct entities that enables them to flourish in their very

difference. This is clearly a traditional dialectical formulation, in which different or opposed positions should and indeed must seek ways to work with one another, rather than uniformity to a single position. We should be careful here, for in ancient China the difference in question also meant social stratification and feudal classes that should—it was believed—live in harmony with one another (Han and Zhang 2018, 35–40). To return to music: the five notes of the ancient pentatonic scale were seen as representing social distinctions that should avoid disharmony and social disorder.[8] Thus, the purpose of music was also to ensure "harmony between high and low [上下和 *shangxia he*]" (Hu and Zhang 2017, 975; Legge 1885b, 98).

For this reason, we should avoid a simplistic equation between traditional Chinese assumptions concerning harmony and the Marxist tradition. In fact, the notion of social harmony today acknowledges the influence of the Chinese tradition but ensures that it is transformed and reshaped in terms of Marxism and especially dialectical materialism. In this light, the question of harmony becomes one of Marxist dialectics, or "contradiction analysis [矛盾分析法 *maodun fenxifa*]." The relevant principle stems from Engels: the interpenetration of opposites, which would become—via Lenin and Mao Zedong—the unity of opposites through struggle (Engels 1882b, 348; 1882a, 356; Lenin 1915a; 1915b; Mao 1937a; 1937b).[9]

### 9.2.4 Constructing a Harmonious Socialist Society

The Marxist dialectical approach is precisely what frames a relatively recent document that is very relevant for my concerns in the remainder of this chapter. It comes from the CPC's Sixteenth Central Committee and is entitled *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society* (2006).[10]

Noting that the reform and opening-up has generated unprecedented development and social change, and that it has injected extraordinary vitality into China's development, the *Decision* also notes a whole series of contradictions that had arisen: uneven development between urban and rural areas, between different regions, and between economy and society; increasing pressures in relation to population, resources, and the environment; problems relating to employment, social security, income

distribution, education, medical care, housing, workplace safety, and public order. These and more recur through the text, indicating a transparent recognition of the substantial problems and contradictions that had arisen as a result of the breakneck economic development of what I have elsewhere called the "wild 90s" (Boer 2021, 93–97). The *Decision* points out that, at the time, institutions and mechanisms were not yet perfect, that socialist democracy and the legal system were not sufficiently sound, and that corruption, infiltration, and sabotage continued to endanger social stability (社会稳定 *shehui wending*).

These sobering observations lead to an underlying philosophical principle:

> No society can be free of contradictions, and human society always develops and progresses in the movement of contradictions. Constructing a harmonious socialist society is a continuous process of resolving social contradictions. We should always keep a clear mind, in times of peace prepare for danger, understand deeply the characteristics of the development phases in our country, scientifically analyse the contradictions and problems affecting social harmony and its reasons, more actively face up to and resolve contradictions, maximise harmonious factors, minimise disharmonious factors, and constantly promote social harmony … Building a harmonious socialist society is a long-term historical task permeating the whole process of socialism with Chinese characteristics (CPC Central Committee 2006, 2).[11]

This theoretical observation comes straight out of the Marxist tradition's dialectical materialist method, or contradiction analysis. In this light, the *Decision* identifies both principles and tasks. The principles include putting people first (以人为本 *yiren weiben*), socialist democracy, rule of law, and leadership of the Communist Party—familiar features of China's whole process people's democracy (see the previous chapter). But let us focus on the seven specific measures for promoting a harmonious society. I will provide more detail here, since these measures are very relevant for the analysis of Xinjiang to follow.

The first policy measure involves making substantive progress in constructing a "new socialist countryside [社会主义 新农村 *shehuizhuyi*

*xin nongcun*]" and promoting balanced development between urban and rural areas. This is by no means a quick fix, and can be seen today in the targeted rural revitalisation project, the development of high-tech farming, the achievements in overcoming absolute poverty and the shift to the long-term policy of common prosperity. A decade and half ago, the deep divide that had opened up between country and city was manifested at many levels: poor country areas and prosperous cities, limited medical, educational, and employment prospects in the countryside, with many adults seeking work in the cities and leaving children in the care of grandparents (if they were able). When I spoke with people more than a decade ago, it was precisely this problem that was seen as a major feature of uneven development during the reform and opening-up.

The second item concerns strategies for regional development and balanced development among regions. In this case, a further contradiction overlaying the country-city problem is identified: the growing gap between eastern and western regions. Those who benefited from the initial phase of the reform and opening-up were in the "cradle" of Chinese civilisation, in the eastern parts and in the river plains of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. At this stage, policy was concerned with infrastructural projects in central and western regions—northwest of the Hu Huanyong Line (see below) and including Xinjiang—so as to improve transport, employment, education, and health. It is precisely in these north-western regions that minority nationalities live, where the Red Areas from the long period of revolutionary struggle are to be found, and where we find the most mountainous and resource-rich areas. As we will see, today the Belt and Road Initiative is concerned with improving socio-economic conditions in the north-west.

Third is a proactive policy for employment and labour relations. This is a full-spectrum policy that includes employment growth with economic development, governmental fiscal incentives, educational and vocational training, coordination of job-seekers from all areas with employment opportunities, and above all the fostering of targeted initiatives in local areas, proposed and thus owned by the local people, so as to generate types of employment and projects that suit the characteristics of the area. Here also is a recognition of inadequate labour laws, especially for those who lost their jobs during the "wild 90s," and setting up mechanisms for compensation and reemployment. The massive problem of labour migrating

from the countryside to work in cities is also identified as a core policy concern. Obviously, these measures have a direct bearing on remote northwestern areas with a predominance of minority nationalities, since it is in these areas that adequate employment remained elusive.

The fourth item concerns education, in terms of both development and equity. At the mid-point of the first decade of the new century a whole new impetus for educational improvement began right across the board. From reforms in the Chinese academies of science and social sciences to rural schools, massive resources were devoted to substantial improvements in quality, access, research and training, and curriculum. It was at this time that Marxism as such was designated a core discipline, with its major sub-disciplines. Relevant here also is the resolute focus on improving rural education, especially among minority nationalities in remote areas, as part of solving the city-country gap, as well as regional disparities. From new facilities, through free textbooks, to encouraging quality young teachers to move to country areas, these initiatives and more began a substantial process of renewal and improvement in rural education. The purposes were manifold, including the improvement in the practical abilities of students, in creativity, employability, and initiative. In other words, a key to poverty alleviation was to be in education. Notably, the policy required the increase in government spending on education to four percent of its overall budget.

The fifth measure involves improving health and medical care. This moment marks the beginning of a process to develop a “basic health care system that covers both urban and rural residents, and provide safe, effective, convenient, and affordable public health and basic medical services to the people” (CPC Central Committee 2006, 4). At the time of writing, this comprehensive effort has achieved considerable results for 1.4 billion people. From quality medical professionals in rural areas and collective health clinics, through self-sufficient medicine production and the integration of “Western” and tradition Chinese medicine (TCM), to world-leading research and pro-active disease prevention, the Chinese health system in terms of the sheer speed and scale of implementation, and indeed now comprehensiveness, has surpassed the declining quality of public health systems in places such as Scandinavia. In terms of rural and remote areas, the changes have been noticeable, especially childhood and women’s health—of relevance below concerning population developments in such areas.

The sixth concern is with cultural development, all the way from the cultural forms of minority nationalities to sporting activities. We need to be careful here, for the connotations of "culture [文化 *wenhua*]" are more comprehensive than the English term. It includes material, spiritual, and systemic factors, along with the life and value assumptions of society as a whole in the context of a history that spans five millennia (Zhou Y. 2017, 82; see also Qin 2012). Further, cultural development is by no means a new policy: it has been part and parcel of minority nationalities policy from the beginning. What we see in the *Decision* is more in the way of affirmation that the policy will be continued and indeed improved. Even twenty years ago, Mackerras observed on the basis of first-hand research in relation to Tibet: "what strikes me most forcefully about the period since 1980 or so is not how much the Chinese have harmed Tibetan culture, but how much they have allowed, even encouraged it to revive; not how weak it is, but how strong" (Mackerras 2003, 46). The same can be said even more today of Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and many other minority areas.

The final policy measure concerns environmental protection, of the "harmony between human beings and nature [人与自然相和谐 *ren yu ziran xiang hexie*]." In more recent years, this approach has become known as "ecological civilisation [生态文明 *shengtai wenming*]" (Xi 2013b), which expresses more clearly an age-old assumption in Chinese culture concerning the inescapably integrated and reciprocal relation of an organism with its environment including human beings. At the time of the *Decision*, this had become an urgent matter since China's rapid economic development had well-documented and much-studied effects on pollution of air, water, and land. That something needed to be done was obvious. The *Decision* specifies a range of measures, from new types of technology, innovative approaches (witness now the growth of city water-sinks), and vast improvements in environmental laws. These long-term policies are clearly beginning to bear fruit as China increasingly leads the world in environmental protection and improvement.

I have devoted some time to these seven policy measures: urban–rural coordination; balanced east–west regional development; employment and labour relations; education; health and medical services; cultural development; and environmental protection. The reason is that this full range of specific measures has a direct bearing on my treatment of Xinjiang below, which required improvements in every area detailed here. A question

remains: what bearing do these measures have on social harmony? Simply put, it is a pipe dream to imagine that harmony can be achieved without a resolute emphasis on the economic base, on improving the foundational socio-economic conditions: “to a large degree, social harmony depends on the development of social productive forces” (CPC Central Committee 2006, 3). The catch is that such development must be achieved in a balanced manner. Thus, the focus of these policy measures is on comprehensive methods for resolving concrete economic and social contradictions, from regional disparity to environmental pollution. Further material in the *Decision* builds on this foundation, dealing with social fairness and justice, the ideological and moral foundations of harmony, improved social management, vitality and harmony between the many different parties and groups, and—as may be expected—the Communist Party’s leadership in fostering a harmonious socialist society. All of this leads us to define a harmonious society as one in which economic conditions have been addressed, socialist democracy and rule of law have been promoted, as also fairness and justice, integrity and friendship, vitality, stability and order, and harmony between human beings and nature. It is difficult not to see how all of this is a deep expression of the people’s will.

By way of conclusion to this treatment of the *Decision*, I would like to engage in a brief word study. Harmony—和谐 *hexie*—is the dominant word used in the text. But we also find 18 occurrences of “stability [稳定 *wending*],” along with a couple of occurrences of “reliable [稳妥 *wentuo]*.” Not unexpectedly, “safety [安全 *anquan*]” turns up frequently, no less than 24 times, along with cognates such as “peace [和平 *heping*]” on 15 occasions, and four occurrences of another related term for calm or “stable [安定 *anding*].” I do not wish to belabour the reader with an exhaustive analysis of each occurrence, but there is an important passage that indicates the close connections between the terms:

> We should persevere in handling correctly the relation between reform, development, and stability [稳定 *wending*]. The intensity of reform, speed of development, and social sustainability need to be integrated, so as to maintain social stability and unity [安定团结 *anding tuanjie*]. To advance harmony through reform, to consolidate harmony through development, to ensure harmony through stability

> [以稳定 *yi wending*], is the way to guarantee that people live and work in peace and contentment [安居乐业 *anju leye*], society is stable and orderly [安定有序 *anding youxu*], and the country is peacefully governed over the long term [长治久安 *changzhi jiu'an*].

I have selected this text not merely for the conjunction of stability, safety, and harmony, and indeed unity, peace, and orderly life, but also for the complex dialectical formulations. These are not simply to be seen as the balancing of contrasting forces, but rather the achievement—as three syntactically similar phrases put it—of harmony through, or by means of, reform, development, and stability. Given the immense tradition of harmony through diversity, it is not difficult to see why such harmony is a key feature of the people will, of their heart's desire for society. As the *Decision* puts in a key phrase, this expresses the "feeling of safety among the masses [人民群众安全感 *renmin qunzhong anquangan*]" (CPC Central Committee 2006, 9).

Much has taken place since the *Decision*, and many have been the achievements since that moment of addressing some profound contradictions that had arisen during the initial years of the reform and opening-up. But the *Decision* did pinpoint and reclaim within a Marxist framework the extremely important expectations of Chinese people for stability, safety, and harmony, expectations that not a few had begun to doubt. Subsequently, harmony was included as one of the core socialist values (CPC Central Committee 2013; Xi 2014; Zhang Weiwen, Huang, and Jiang 2015; Han and Zhang 2018, 139–143), and it has become an inescapable feature of policies since that time. I would like to conclude this section on a geographical note: harmony also has a very concrete geographical meaning in China, which varies between river plains and towering mountain ranges, between vast differences in regional characteristics within a unified country. In this sense, harmony is a very concrete need and desire.

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## 9.3 Xinjiang and Geography

The second half of the chapter moves to a specific case study that illustrates clearly the questions of stability, safety, and harmony: Xinjiang Uighur

Autonomous Region. After some deliberations on geographical and population matters, the analysis moves, via first-hand experience, to the preferential policies for minority nationalities in socialist countries such as China, with specific reference to minorities in Xinjiang. The final section turns to the question of a Marxist approach to human rights and how these rights are protected and promoted in Xinjiang.

To begin with geography: in more recent years, China has stepped onto the centre of the world stage. As a result, the country's regions, provinces, and autonomous regions are starting to become known around the world. Even so, much still needs to be learnt (Fig. 9.1).

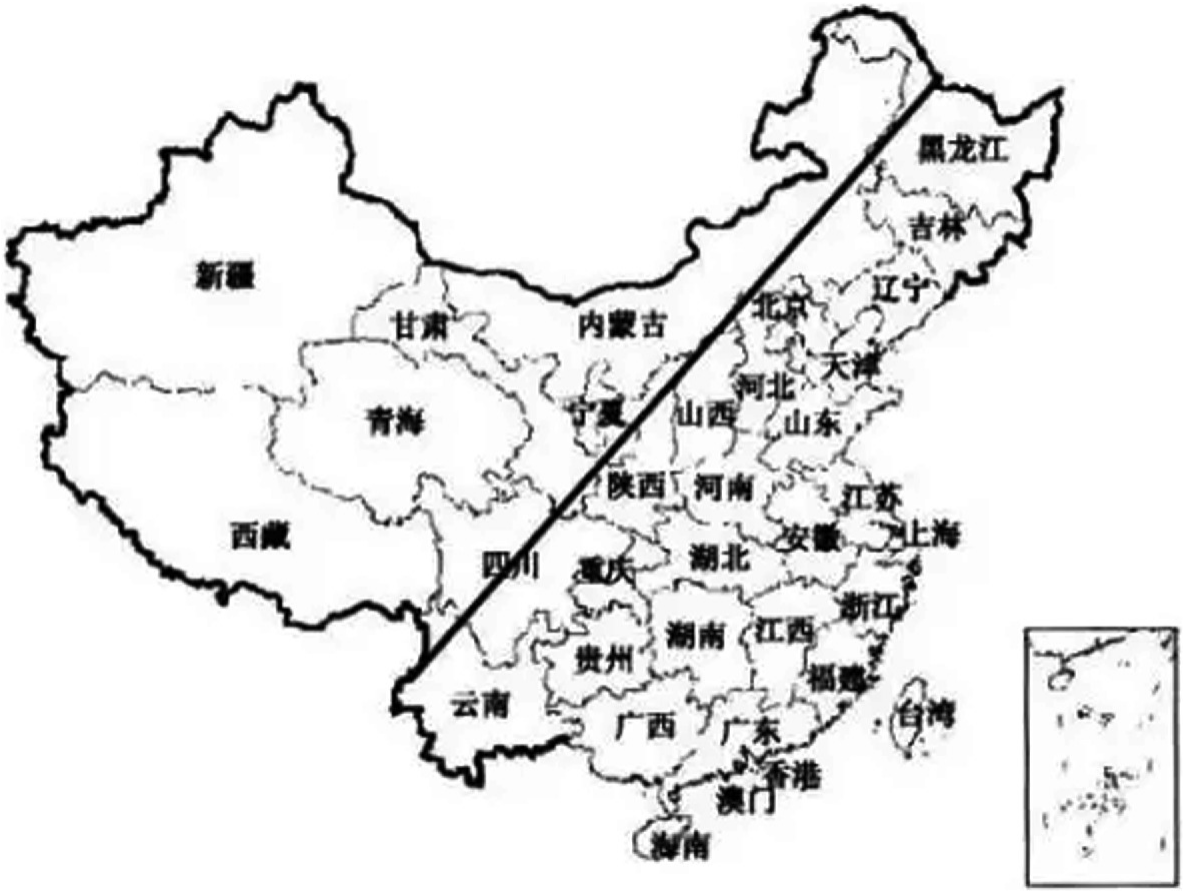


***Fig. 9.1*** Hu Huanyong Line

## 9.3.1 The Hu Huanyong Line

The map here is a copy of an original initially published in 1935. Notice the black line, which runs from Aihui (now Heihe, in Heilongjiang province) in the northeast to Tengchong (in Yunnan province) in the southwest. For this

reason, it is sometimes called the Aihui-Tengchong line, although it is more commonly known as the Hu Huanyong line (胡焕庸线 *Hu Huanyong xian*). It is named after the geographer who first identified the line almost 90 years ago in an article entitled "Population Distribution in China—with Statistical Tables and Density Maps" (Hu H. 1935). It is from this article that I have drawn the map, and we can see the main concern from its title. What were Hu's findings?

On the basis of a careful study of population data over the centuries, Hu Huanyong found that about 94 percent of the Chinese population has historically flourished south east of the line from Aihui (Heihe) to Tengchong. Further, political power has historically been located in the same zone. But there is a problem: most of the mineral resources and headwaters of the major rivers are northwest of the line, where about six percent of the population lives. This vast northwestern area also contains border regions such as Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The outcome: from earlier forms of the state until today, there has been a resolute focus on the unification of diverse areas (Hao 2020, 125–128). Historically, with the rarest of exceptions the only wars that China has fought have concerned the unification of its diverse areas. Further, the state has focused from time immemorial to redistributing resources from the sparsely populated regions to those of population density. As mentioned above, all of this means that Chinese notions of stability, safety, and especially harmony—as a union of opposites in which diversity flourishes—have always had a very concrete reference to the disparate regions of China.

Many are the studies of the Hu Huanyong line and its direct influence on policy decisions, but allow me to generate a map that uses the latest statistics from China's National Bureau of Statistics (国家统计局 *guojia tongjiju*). The material used here relates primarily to the census of 2020 (NBS 2021d; 2021c; 2021a; 2021b) (Fig. 9.2).[12]

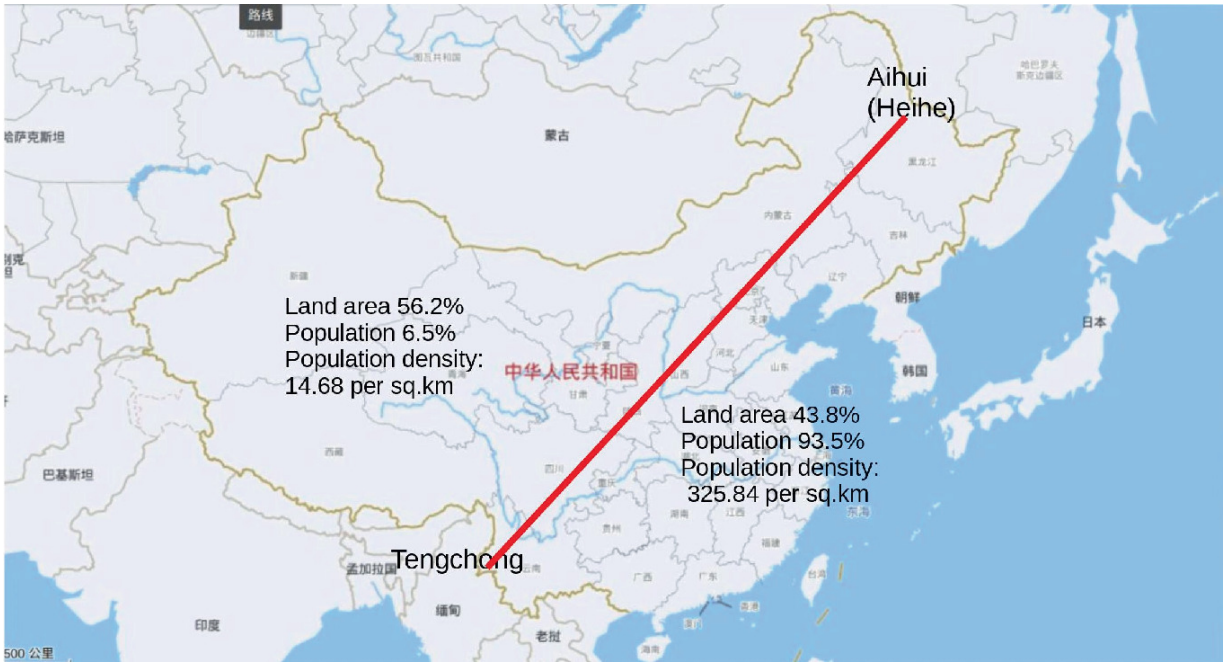


***Fig. 9.2*** Population Distribution in China (author produced map)

## 9.3.2 The Hexi Corridor

There is another important geographical reality in China, which is known as the Hexi Corridor (河西走廊 *Hexi zoulang*) (Fig. 9.3).

***Fig. 9.3*** The Hexi Corridor (author produced map)

This natural corridor is 1200 kms in length and— running between high plateaus, in Qinghai to the south and Inner Mongolia to the north—connects the eastern areas with what is now known as Xinjiang (Fig. 9.4).

***Fig. 9.4*** Hexi Corridor detail (map from public domain)

The name "Hexi [河西 *hexi*]" simply means "West of the River," the river in question being the Yellow River (黄河 *Huang He*). In our time, the province of Gansu marks—by and large—the route of the corridor. From a strategic and economic perspective, the Hexi Corridor is vitally important. Strategically, it has been a point of struggle for centuries and indeed millennia. A little over two millennia ago, the Western Han Dynasty managed to gain control in struggles with the Xiongnu and established the Western Regions Frontier Command; a millennium later it was the Tang Dynasty, who once again gained firm control of the whole route; but it was only in the middle of the eighteenth century—almost 300 years ago—that the Qing Dynasty was able to include Xinjiang fully within China. Economically, it was precisely the Hexi Corridor that provided the initial route through China for the ancient Silk Road. By the time the route reached Xinjiang, it took two paths, one in a southerly direction and the other in a northerly direction, before crossing into central Asia. It was along

this route that Buddhism came into China, that the people now known as the Hui Nationality came from many parts further West, and indeed the way that advanced Chinese ideas passed into Western Europe to spur the European Enlightenment. And, of course, it was the absolutely vital trade route across the whole of Eurasia—silks, for example, had already made their way into Europe at the time of Julius Ceasar of ancient Rome (Gan 2019, 263–270). Needless to say, the Hexi Corridor today is a linchpin of the new Silk Road, or the Belt and Road Initiative.

By now the reader should be able to see why Xinjiang is so important for China. Not only is it the major region on China's western border with a history of two millennia, but it also forms the end of the Hexi Corridor and the passage into Central Asia. Xinjiang has always been and will continue to be of utmost strategic, economic, and political importance.

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## 9.4 Preferential Policies for Minority Nationalities

To begin this section with a story: not long after the Kunming Railway Station massacre of March 2014, I was teaching a class in Beijing. The massacre was perpetrated by about a dozen Uyghur terrorists, who killed 31 people with knives and injured more than 140 others (this was one of thousands of such incidents in China since the 1990s). In my class was a young Uyghur student. She and her sister are both from Xinjiang and were studying in Beijing. During a presentation to the class, she made an impassioned speech. "Islam is a religion of peace and not violence," she said. "I am a Uyghur and am proud to be Chinese. The vast majority of Uyghur people see themselves as part of China and condemn the terrorists." Why did she feel that she needed to make this point to the class?

At the time, many other people and nationalities in China distrusted the Uyghur, seeing them all as troublemakers and terrorists. I recall expressing a desire at the time to visit Xinjiang, and one of my colleagues said, "Don't go there, the situation is dangerous." The hard task for the local government in Xinjiang and the government in Beijing was to prevent this negative attitude to Uyghur people from spreading and cementing itself. In other words, there was a heavy focus on ensuring that all of the other nationalities respected Uyghur people and saw them as equally part of China.

### 9.4.1 Historical Development of the Preferential Policies

To go further: a major feature of all socialist countries since the earliest days of the Soviet Union has been preferential policies for minority nationalities.[13] These include high levels of autonomy in governance, economic support, fostering of minority languages, education, culture, and so on. We need to be careful here and avoid seeing the preferential policies for minority nationalities from a Western colonialist perspective. These policies are not simply promoted by a government for minorities who are outside the structures of power; instead, the policies arise from the fact that minorities are very much embodied in the structures of governance.

Let us consider the history and enactment of the preferential policies in China in a little more detail,[14] since they provide the framework for China's response to the terrorism, extremism, and separatism that has been found in Xinjiang since the 1990s. Historically, we can see minorities' policies emerging already in the 1930s, from the time of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet.[15] In light of earlier experience, Mao observed in the context of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance: "give the Meng, Hui, Zang, Miao, Yao, Yi, Fan, and all the other nationalities equal rights with the Han. Under the principle of joint resistance to Japan, they have the right to manage their own affairs, while at the same time uniting with the Han to establish a unified state" (Mao 1938a, 619; 1938b, 506). By 1936, the first Yuhai Hui Autonomous Government was established in a mosque in Tongxin county in Ningxia province (Hao 2020, xv), and in 1941 the Mongolian and Hui autonomous regions were permanently established within the Red Areas (Fang 2015, 53–54). After liberation in 1949, the "Common Program" emphasised equality and unity between all nationalities, and stressed the need to establish autonomous regions where nationalities are concentrated. Note article 53 of the Common Program: "All minority nationalities have the freedom to develop their spoken and written languages, to maintain or reform their customs and religious beliefs. The people's governments shall assist the people of the minority nationalities in developing the construction of their political, economic, cultural and educational institutions" (CPPCC 1949, Article 53; see also NPC 2018, Article 4). Clearly, minority nationalities have been an integral part of the political structure from the beginning. However, the process of identifying nationalities required extensive research by teams across China during the 1950s (Ma 2012; Hao

2020 80–86), with the eventual result that 56 official 民族 *minzu*,[16] were recognised, including the majority Han and 55 other groups, with the latter ranging in size from almost 20 million to a few thousand.

### 9.4.2 Culture and Education

In what follows, I will focus on the four features of the minority nationalities policy mentioned in the "Common Program," although in this order: culture and education, politics, and economy. Throughout this overview, we need to remember that the implementation and refinement, and indeed revision where mistakes are made, of the policies is a long term project that must negotiate many challenges (Hao 2020, 207–225). In terms of culture and education, local languages are fostered in media, literature, and in schools (Hao 2020, 179–184).[17] Local customs, rituals, festivals, and especially religions are not merely permitted but actively supported, with temples, churches, and mosques constructed and maintained with state funds (Hao 2020, 184–193). In many cases, the minorities are far more religious than the Han majority, since often cultural identity is connected with religion (for example, the primary identification of the Hui Nationality is Islam). Obviously, religions must operate within the laws of the land, and cannot be leveraged for treasonous activities. In schools, children have classes in their local language, alongside the obligatory classes in Mandarin, which is needed for communication across China and for work. In regard to universities, there are *minzu* universities in all regions, and students are assisted—through quotas and extra points—for university entrance examinations (*gaokao*). These policies have, through much trial and error, become well-established in China and minorities attest to their overall effectiveness. But they are not fixed and unchangeable, especially in light of the rapid pace of development in China. Ma Rong (2010) identifies a tension between "protecting the traditional culture" and "realising the modernisation" of minorities, especially in terms of the mobility of labour and participation in political, cultural, and economic life.

### 9.4.3 Governance

The question of governance has two levels, the one local and the other country-wide. Locally, autonomous regions and prefectures number almost 160 in China, with significant autonomy in policy development. Minorities are also assured representation in the local level People's Political

Consultative Conferences and can be elected to the local People's Congresses. At a country-wide level, all minority nationalities are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), along with delegates who may—through initial direct elections and then higher-level indirect elections—become delegates in the annual National People's Congress. If we include the fact that people from minority nationalities are also members of the CPC, with the percentage growing to the point that it is almost equivalent to the percentage of minority nationalities among the population as a whole (8.14%), then it is clear that minority nationalities are structurally integral to the whole political system in China.

However, it is at the level of governance that a contradiction arises, between autonomy and unity. How does the significant emphasis on autonomous decision-making and policy development relate to the unified strength of the country as a whole? Western imperialist efforts to exploit the autonomy of minority nationalities' regions are by no means new. The focus on Xinjiang is only the latest wave of efforts that have at times included Tibet, Taiwan island, Hong Kong SAR, and other regions. For example, soon after the Xinhai (Republican) revolution of 1911, the independence of Outer Mongolia was proclaimed; following many years of trying to dominate Tibet, in 1914 the British imperialists attempted to instigate the "independence of Tibet" in the Simla Accord of that year; the Japanese—who had already invaded and annexed Taiwan island in 1895—invaded northeastern China in 1931 and established the puppet regime of "Manchukuo"; soon afterwards, Uyghur separatists founded the short-lived "East Turkestan Islamic State" in Xinjiang; in 1935 Japan hatched a conspiracy to found a "Mongolian State" in Inner Mongolia; and there were Japanese preparations for establishing "Huihuiguo" (a separate state for Hui people) in the Ningxia region (Hao 2020, 44–60). Zhou Enlai's observation in 1949 came out of this background, warning that the newly-liberated China should be on its guard: "Today the imperialists want to split Tibet, Taiwan and even Xinjiang; in this case, we hope that all nationalities do not listen to the provocation of imperialists" (Zhou E. 1949, 140). What has been the response in China to such efforts? While a few scholars have suggested that political autonomy for minorities should be downplayed and the term "nation" reserved only for China as a whole (Ma 2007; 2011; see also Zhang J. and Wei 2018), others continue to emphasise a Marxist

dialectical approach of diversity in unity: the greater the autonomy, the greater the unity; the more people's lives are improved through the preferential policies, the more do they see themselves as part of the whole (Fei 1989; Wang X. 2009; 2010; Wu and Hao 2017, 4).

### 9.4.4 Economic Development

The final category of preferential policies concerns economic development, which not only reflects the Marxist emphasis on the economic base, but also leads to the analysis in the following section. As noted earlier, many of the minority nationalities in China live in remote border regions to the northwest of the Hu Huanyong Line, and as a result many of them have lagged behind in China's rapid economic development. Many have been the programs over the years to develop local economies and improve basic living conditions, with significant funding from the central government for all manner of projects, favourable conditions for the establishment of local enterprises, and so on. Those from minority backgrounds have been provided with favourable opportunities for study and work. It was these types of policies to which the student in my class was alluding. At the time, she came from a relatively poor region of China—parts of Xinjiang were then still mired in absolute poverty. The preferential policies had given her and her sister an opportunity to study in Beijing.

At the same time, the policies up to about a decade ago had fallen short of the mark. As the 2006 *Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society* fully recognised more than 15 years ago (see above), uneven and unbalanced development remained a significant problem. While development had improved the lives of hundreds of millions in the "cradle" of Chinese civilisation, southeast of the Hu Huanyong Line, in the sparsely populated border regions poverty was still a problem. In short, despite all of the efforts at economic assistance to these areas—including Xinjiang—the results remained unsatisfactory (Jing 2006; Hao 2020, 128–139). Absolute poverty remained a major problem in remote and rural areas.

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## 9.5 Marxist Human Rights

The economic question brings us to human rights. Let me begin with a quotation: the "people of the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang have seen

great progress in the protection of their human rights" (SCIO 2017b, 2; 2017a, 2; see also Bi and Li 2011). Yes, there are many minority nationalities in Xinjiang—13 with historical presence and more than 40 today. But what is meant by rights, specifically human rights? For those of us who have been brought up in one of the few Western countries in the world—all former colonisers—"human rights" automatically brings to mind freedom of expression, assembly, and movement. I will not spend any time on this very limited sense of these Western liberal human rights, save to note that it is based on private property (Marx and Engels 1848a, 475, 481; 1848b, 498, 504).

### 9.5.1 The Marxist Tradition

There is, however, another tradition of human rights that arises from the Marxist tradition and is promoted vigorously in China. To explain: while the roots are anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic sovereignty (shared by all colonised countries), the core human right is the right to subsistence, to socio-economic well-being, to common prosperity.

We can note key moments in the development of this approach, such as Engels's point that the purpose of socialism is to guarantee "the subsistence of the proletariat" (Engels 1847, 102), or Stalin's point that the core to all rights is freedom from exploitation. Rights are meaningless if a person is "haunted by the fear of being tomorrow deprived of work, of home and of bread" (Stalin 1936a, 110; 1936b, 144). Instead, socialism seeks a "prosperous and cultured life" for all (Stalin 1934a, 358; 1934b, 365; Supreme Soviet 1936b, stat'ia 131; 1936a, article 131). We can note the slogan from the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet of the late 1920s and early 1930s: ensure that people have a roof over their heads, food, clothes, and warmth in winter, and then they will become communists. Or Deng Xiaoping's point that "poor socialism" is not socialism at all, since the purpose of socialism is to raise the socio-economic well-being of all as a preparation for communism (Deng 1979a, 231; 1979b, 235; 1986a, 172; 1986b, 174). Today, of course, this approach to human rights is embodied in the core policy of "common prosperity."[18]

In order to summarise what could be a much longer analysis (Boer 2022), the following image is useful (Fig. 9.5).

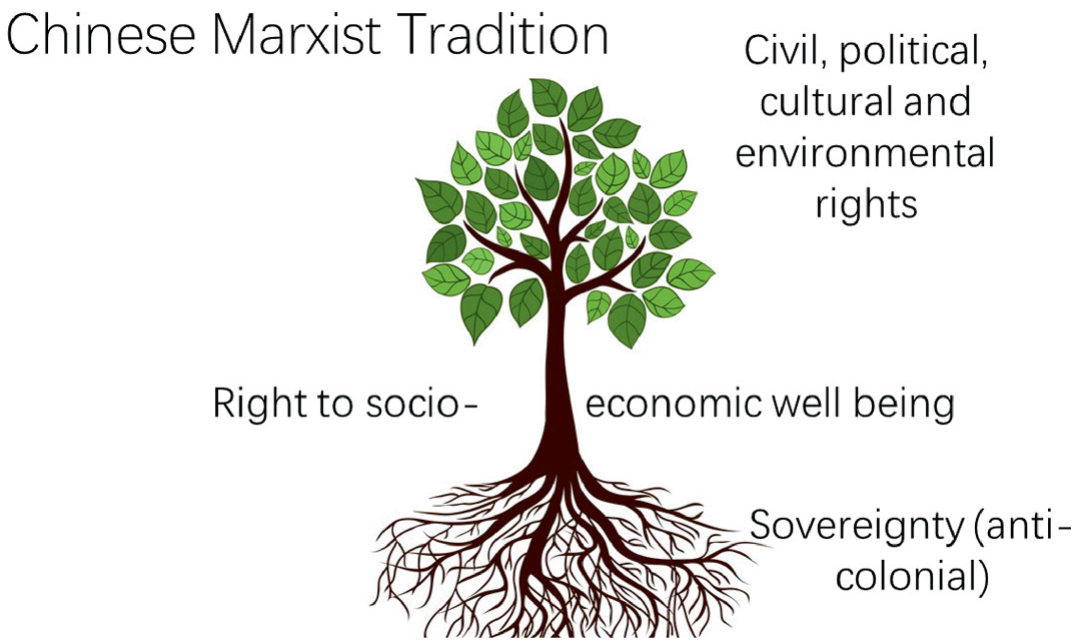
Chinese Marxist Tradition
Civil, political, cultural and environmental rights
Right to socio-economic well being
Sovereignty (anti-colonial)

***Fig. 9.5*** The Marxist approach to human rights

Thus, the roots of this approach to human rights is anti-colonial or anti-hegemonic sovereignty, since rights are meaningless if a country is subjected to imperialist colonisation. The trunk is—as I have discussed—socio-economic well-being, and it is from this core right that all other rights flow. A question remains: do citizens of a socialist country need to wait until they have all been lifted out of poverty and achieve at least moderate prosperity before the flowering of civil, political, cultural, and environmental rights? Of course not, but the process is a gradual one. As the socio-economic conditions improve for urban and rural workers, more substantive rights become materially possible. They grow over time, along with improving living conditions. Or, as Fang Ning puts it, from a Marxist perspective, human rights are historical rather than innate, are granted by society rather than by nature, and are practical rather than ideal (Fang 2015, 107–111).

### 9.5.2 Xinjiang and Human Rights

What has this Marxist approach to human rights got to do with Xinjiang? Precisely because Xinjiang has been and continues to be so strategic and economically important, it has been plagued by periodic difficulties. However, the 1990s were crucial. At that time, currents of Islamic radicalism began be promoted in some parts of the population and there was

a rise in terrorist incidents (Hao 2020, 154–156). Weapons, explosives, and militants began crossing the mountainous borders along drug routes from the west, usually funded by Western sources (Davis 2013, 102–103, 118). From the mid-1990s until 2016, there had been thousands of terrorist incidents, mostly targeted at other Uyghur people (SCIO 2019b; 2019a).

Marxist analysis was deployed. To begin with, the immediate questions of safety, stability, and social harmony had to be addressed. A new governor with a reputation for getting things done was appointed to Xinjiang. The result: since 2016 there have been no terrorist incidents. But how is this Marxist? Achieving social stability and peace was simply a prerequisite for economic development. The analysis by many scholars and policy makers was that the root cause of the unrest and difficulties in Xinjiang was endemic poverty. Obviously, this is a direct application of the primary rights to economic well-being and development (SCIO 2021c, 2; 2021a, 4). With limited job opportunities, young people especially would be attracted to extremist views, and engage in separatist and terrorist activities. As a result of these conclusions, many angles were developed to improve the socioeconomic conditions (Hao 2020, 157–158). The quality of education was improved so as to enable young people to find jobs. This of course included ideological education in Marxism and religion—yes, some of the key teachers were Muslim imams. Job opportunities have also increased, with incomes rising at about 10 percent per year (SCIO 2021c, 5; 2021a, 12). Further, experienced Party branch secretaries and young CPC members volunteered to work in poor villages so as to develop targeted programs, in light of concrete conditions, so as to lift people out of poverty.[19] Indeed, Xinjiang—where some of the most intractable poverty in China could be found—was finally declared free of poverty in all areas in late 2020 (as Hao Shiyuan points out (2020, 143–144), the Chinese definition of poverty and thus alleviation from poverty is more comprehensive than that of the World Bank). In Xinjiang, by the end of 1920 more than 2.7 million in some of the remotest regions of China had been lifted out of poverty. This was, however, only the first step. Apart from putting in place measures to ensure that people do not fall back into poverty, the program now is to improve people's lives much further. Measures in the more remote areas include targeted efforts to ensure employment—based on the right to work—for workers from poor families, people experiencing difficulties in finding work, and rural women. A comprehensive welfare system has also been

developed in the last decade, so much so that Xinjiang took the lead in China in terms of retirement pensions, and medical, work-related injury, and unemployment insurance.

### 9.5.3 Xinjiang's Population

It is also necessary to address here the topic of Xinjiang's population. Simply put, over the last 40 years the total population of Xinjiang has doubled. In 1978 there were 13.08 million residents; and by 2020 the population was 25.85 million. When we focus on minority nationalities, we see a comparable population growth, as this table of census data shows (Fig. 9.6).

**Minority Nationalities'Population Growth in Xinjiang**

| Census | Year | Minority Nationalities' Population | Increase from Previous Census | CAGR from Previous Census[20] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | 1953 | 4,451,500 | -- | -- |
| 2nd | 1964 | 4,948,900 | 497,400 | 0.97% |
| 3rd | 1982 | 7,797,500 | 2,848,600 | 2.56% |
| 4th | 1990 | 9,461,500 | 1,664,000 | 2.45% |
| 5th | 2000 | 10,969,600 | 1,508,100 | 1.49% |
| 6th | 2010 | 12,985,900 | 2,016,300 | 1.70% |
| 7th | 2020 | 14,932,200 | 1,946,300 | 1.41% |

***Fig. 9.6*** Population growth of minority nationalities in Xinjiang (SCIO 2021b, 2; 2021d, 5; see also NBS 2011) (CAGR refers to the Compound Annual Growth Rate)

From the first census after liberation to 2020, the population of minorities in Xinjiang has more than trebled; and from the beginning of the reform and opening-up, this population has doubled. Is the situation for the Uyghur any different? Not at all, for they too have doubled in number in the last 40 years (Fig. 9.7).

**Uygur Population Growth Between National Censuses**

| Year of Census | Uygur Population | Increase from Previous Census | CAGR from Previous Census |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1953 | 3,607,600 | -- | -- |
| 1964 | 3,991,600 | 384,000 | 0.92% |
| 1982 | 5,955,900 | 1,964,300 | 2.25% |
| 1990 | 7,191,800 | 1,235,900 | 2.38% |
| 2000 | 8,345,600 | 1,153,800 | 1.50% |
| 2010 | 10,001,300 | 1,655,700 | 1.83% |
| 2020 | 11,624,300 | 1,623,000 | 1.52% |

***Fig. 9.7*** Population Growth of the Uyghur Minority (SCIO 2021b, 4; 2021d, 8)

Statistics are important, but they can get us only so far. Analysis provides a more nuanced understanding, which points out that there have been three main periods of population growth: low growth, due to high birth and death rates; high growth, due to high birth and low death rates; low growth, due to low birth and death rates (SCIO 2021b, 5–8; 2021d, 9–14).[20] The middle period of high growth was due to vastly improved medical care, and a rapidly increasing life expectancy from a low of 30 in 1949. It was also due to the fact that smaller nationalities such as the Uyghur were exempted from the recently abolished one-child policy (albeit with increased limits), and to the persistence of traditional cultural and religious assumptions concerning women and childbirth. In this context, it was assumed that a woman would have on average six children. The more recent period—somewhat delayed in relation to the rest of the country (Li, Yang, and Jiang 2019)—of lower population growth is due to significant economic development (as noted), stricter regulation of limiting the number of children to three,[21] and extraordinary progress in education. In 1949, only 19.8 percent of children were receiving education and only ten percent were literate. Among these, no women were literate. Now, 98–100 percent of children receive education, and literacy is universal (NBS 2021a). Further, the vast improvement in public health has meant that women have access to a full range of health services, including prenatal and postnatal care, children's health, and family planning options. If we include the many

employment opportunities for women, who now make up 47.43% of the workforce, it should be no surprise that young Uyghur women are making clearer choices about their lives, and that they prefer smaller families. The future is focused on quality population growth, with a robust economy, a full range of educational and employment opportunities, and healthy children.

## 9.6 The Belt and Road Initiative

In all of this, the most significant project is the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in neighbouring Kazakhstan in 2013 (Xi 2013a). The BRI has many dimensions, but Xinjiang is one of the linchpins (Hao 2020 158–164). Nearly all of the long-distance freight trains running across the Eurasian landmass—and there are thousands of these trains now—run through Xinjiang. Major oil and gas pipelines from central Asia run through Xinjiang. As a hub of the new Silk Road, Xinjiang's economy has been booming. While the figures for 2020 are a little lower due to the pandemic, for the last ten years, the economy in Xinjiang has grown at a rate of about 10% per year (SCIO 2021c, 4–5; 2021a, 11–12). I should add that the emphasis has been very much on high-quality and "green" development, especially since Xinjiang's economic boom has benefited from coming relatively late and has been able to avoid many of the pollution problems associated with development elsewhere in the country in the 1980s and 1990s (Aili and Li 2021; Gao Zhiliang and Li 2021; Gao Zhigang, Ding, and Yang 2022). As a sign of all this economic development, in 2018 and 2019 there were about 150 million visitors to Xinjiang, not merely from other parts of China, but also from other countries.

## 9.7 Conclusion

In relation to Xinjiang, a question remains: why have the declining and fragmenting Western imperialists given up on the Dalai Lama and made Xinjiang the flavour of the month, deploying the old anti-communist playbook of "atrocity propaganda"? By now the answer should be obvious. As a precondition to all human rights, Xinjiang is at last realising the core Marxist human right to socio-economic well-being, or common prosperity (SCIO 2021c, 4; 2021a, 11). For Western imperialists this is intolerable. To

be sure, Xinjiang's immense strategic, political, and economic important are also reasons, but the core reason is Xinjiang's clear move towards common prosperity. All of these developments have been the concern of Chinese research, with careful assessments of how to deal with this frenetic effort at Western discourse dominance (X. Li 2019; Zheng 2021). There is a concern in these works that the influence of Chinese discourse has diminished somewhat as a result of Western efforts at atrocity propaganda. However, it is notable that Western efforts concerning Xinjiang have moved up—compared with earlier efforts—another notch or two. They are now based on pure fabrication, which is repeated ad nauseam, and is then enhanced once again. This extreme and frenetic level indicates that such an approach may well be running out of steam, as witnessed by the majority of countries and peoples in the world who are no longer persuaded or influenced by Western smears. In the case of Xinjiang, the most notable example is Muslim-majority countries, who understand the reality in Xinjiang and support China's efforts. Not so long ago, these Muslim-majority countries were the target and they are certainly not to be persuaded by the recent extremities of Western propaganda. To be added here is that in 2016, Sinopec announced the discovery of massive oil and gas fields in the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, with more discovered in 2020. This is one the largest reserves of oil and gas in Asia.

To return to the question of stability, safety, and harmony. Earlier, I emphasised that the foundation of these deep cultural assumptions is economic development. I also noted a dialectic, in which harmony was to be achieved through, and not in spite of, reform and development, indeed that greater stability would be achieved through such processes. The reference was to the *Decision* of 2006. In light of the treatment of Xinjiang, it has become clear that stability and safety have also required resolute and consistent policies of anti-terrorism and de-radicalisation. These measures are indispensable, but they are by no means enough. More substantially, realistic programs for full-spectrum economic and social development have also been needed, so as to ensure the socio-economic well-being, the common prosperity of all nationalities in Xinjiang. That these long-term measures would improve the lives of all in Xinjiang should be obvious. That they have also enabled greater participation in the process of whole process people's democracy should also be obvious.

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# Footnotes

1 The second is from Mao Zedong, in a speech at the second plenary session of the CPC’s Eight Central Committee in November of 1956. The full sentence reads: “When we have such a set of cadres who have been tested in different revolutionary periods, we can ‘let the wind and waves rise while sitting firmly on the fishing boat’. We have this much confidence” (Mao 1956, 327).

2 While there are now many translations of the *Yijing* (or *Zhouyi*) and its many commentaries, I have opted here for the classic translation by Legge, with some small modifications. A bilingual online version of the text may be found at https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/xi-ci-xia.

3 The *Cihai* cites the first occurrence in *Jiaoshi yilin* (焦氏易林), or *Mr. Jiao's Forest of Thoughts on the Book of Changes*, from the first century BCE: "The road is even and smooth, safe and without anxiety [道里夷易, 安全无患 *daoli yiyi, anquan wuhuan*]" (Jiao 2017, 120, 259). The Chinese text may be found at https://ctext.org/jiaoshi-yilin/xiao-chu-zhi.

4 The classic translation by Legge is also still in use today (1885a; 1885b). The reader may find the bilingual text online at https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji.

5 As also attested in the *Book of Documents* (尚书 *Shangshu*) and *Rites of Zhou* (周礼 *Zhouli*) (Wang and Wang 2012; Xu and Chang 2014).

6 Music, rites, and philosophy are somewhat arbitrary distinctions, especially when considering material from more that two millennia ago. It is not simply that Confucius and the early Confucians were promoters of the centrality of music and rites; it is also the case that the thoughts and practices deriving from the early days of the Zhou Dynasty provided the worldview, ethical framework, and political philosophy for Confucian thought and its flourishing (Gan 2019, 219).

7 The reader may usefully consult the overviews from a Chinese perspective by Gan Chunsong (2019, 217–223), and from a Western perspective by Roger Ames (1993, 43–48; 2021, 106–145).

8 "The note 宫 *gong* represents the ruler; 商 *shang*, the ministers; 角 *jue*, the people; 徵 *zhi*, affairs; and 羽 *yu*, things. If there be no disorder or irregularity in these five notes, there will be no want of harmony in the state … If the five notes are all irregular, and injuriously interfere with one another, they indicate a state of insolent disorder, and the state where this is the case will at no distant day meet with extinction and ruin" (Hu and Zhang 2017, 968; Legge 1885b, 94). Translation modified.

9 For a full treatment of contradiction analysis, from Engels to Mao Zedong and today, see an earlier study (Boer 2021, 55–84).

10 As is to be expected, a renewed level of scholarship on 和谐 *hexie* was spurred on by the *Decision*, and the term was included as one of the "core socialist values" (Zhang Wenxian 2006; Zhou J., Hu, and Wang 2007; Liu 2010).

11 Compare, for example, an observation from the Soviet Union in the 1930s: "If in developed socialism there were no contradictions—contradictions between productive forces and relations in

production, between production and demand, no contradictions in the development of technique, etc.—then the development of socialism would be impossible, then instead of movement we would have stagnation. Only in virtue of the internal contradictions of the socialist order can there be development from one phase to another and higher order" (Shirokov and Iankovskii 1932, 150).

12 The reader may find English translations of this material at www.stats.gov.cn, in the section entitled "Communiqués." There is also a rather useful overview at https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1727438131357064014&wfr=spider&for=pc.

13 The most comprehensive work in English on the Soviet Union's policies is by Terry Martin (2001), although it is more useful for the massive amount of archival information than the author's conclusions.

14 By far the best works in English on China's nationalities are by Hao (2020) and, a little earlier, Mackerras (2003). In Chinese, the key study by Ma Rong (2007) set the agenda for a whole new level of research.

15 A complete collection documents relating to minority nationalities in the Red Areas during the long revolutionary struggle may be found in *Compilation of Documents on Nationality Issues: 1921–1949 (CPC Central Committee United Front Department 1991)*. See also the historical overview in Hao Shiyuan (2020, ix–xiv).

16 民族 *minzu* came to be the preferred translation for the Russian *natsional'nost*, with the meaning of nationality or nation. It is not the same as an "ethnic group," for which *zuqun* is used. For a detailed history of the development of the usage of 民族 *minzu*, see Hao Shiyuan (2020, 63–67).

17 This process has not been without its problems. For example, smaller nationalities such as the Hezhe, Luoba, Bonan, and Dulong, do struggle at this level. With only a few thousand members and, in some cases, the absence of a written language, the language's survival is an open question.

18 The two most comprehensive websites for human rights matters and research are from the China Society for Human Rights Studies at www.humanrights.cn, with the English version of the website at www.chinahumanrights.org.

19 For example, see the account of work in Aksu, Keping county, by Li Hui, Zhao Minghao, and Zhang Lu (2022).

20 While I rely on carefully tabulated statistics here, there is a wealth of detailed analysis of Xinjiang's population (Wu L. 2017; Li, Yang, and Jiang 2019; Abuduke'ermu et al. 2020; Cai and Li 2020).

21 Enacting this limit in rural areas had been a distinct problem, with traditional cultural assumptions concerning large families more than often prevailing over the policy limit of three per family.

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# 10. Governing the Country According to Law: The Case of the Hong Kong Storm

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## 10.1 Opening Remarks

The second case study that arises from my treatment in chapter eight concerns the rule of law, with a particular focus on the Hong Kong National Security Law that was promulgated in June 2020 and came into effect at the beginning of 2021. I do not see the need to reprise my earlier treatments of rule of law (Sect. 8.5), so will address directly the situation of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). The chapter begins with an overview of the longer history of Hong Kong as a part of China stolen by the British Empire in the nineteenth century and its development as a trade hub—of all manner of commodities legal and illegal—and use as a lever to destabilise the rest of China, economically, politically, and culturally (through religious missionaries). The second part deals with the long and complex negotiations of the 1980s and 1990s concerning Hong Kong's long overdue return to the mainland, with an emphasis on the continual obstructions by the British imperial negotiators. This leads to a treatment of the innovative "one country, two systems" solution proposed by Deng Xiaoping, with reference to three SARs, in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan island. Next, I move to the structural and economic problems of Hong Kong SAR since 1997, which developed a warped economy characterised by oligopoly capitalism, vast income disparities, sluggish economic growth, a polarised

political landscape, and an educational system that sought to promote decaying Western liberal assumptions. These compound problems and tensions were the underlying causes of the “Hong Kong storm [风波 *fengbo*]” that burst forth in 2019–2020, with unrest, riots, violence, and widespread destruction. This was also fanned by foreign interference that sought—once again—to use Hong Kong SAR as a destabilising lever, now in terms of a “colour counter-revolution.” The final part focuses on the comprehensive analysis and measures taken, including economic, political, educational, and media reform, although my particular concern is with the Hong Kong National Security Law itself. This was a comprehensive rule-of-law solution to the immediate problems, and, with effective implementation, brought the unrest to a rapid end. The conclusion considers the longer term goals of Hong Kong SAR’s democratic reforms and economic development, and indicates that the pioneering project of “one country, two systems” has already gained valuable experience for the time when Taiwan island too becomes a special administrative region.

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## 10.2 British Colonial Plunder

The earlier history of Hong Kong, which was stolen from China by the British Empire in 1841, has been told many times. There is no need to repeat the details of that history here, except to emphasise a few points.

To begin with, the British Empire was in the process of establishing empire-wide drug trafficking, or international organised crime, as a lucrative source of revenue (Hao 2020, 24). Knowing full well that the European desire for superior quality Chinese fine wares had absorbed most of the gold and silver mined in Latin America and filled the coffers of the Qing Emperor, the British were seeking a way to move the wealth in their own direction. Hence the enforcement of opium as an item of trade on countries that were notably unwilling to engage in such trade—China included. The two Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), and indeed the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Revolution in the middle of the nineteenth century, were direct manifestations of, and resistance to, the imposition of drug-trafficking.

Further, as a colony of the British Empire, Hong Kong became a lever for destabilising an increasingly weakened Qing Empire. With the coffers emptying due to the opium trade, with military defeat and endless

incursions—more than 400—and open hostilities by Western imperialist powers at the height of the their game, the economic, social, and cultural fabric of China had begun to unravel. The colony in the Pearl River Delta was a handy location for the British imperialists to engage in widespread destabilisation. Although foreign residents in Hong Kong were ostensibly banned from the mainland, many loopholes were exploited. Economically, Hong Kong was a conduit for nefarious British products that passed onto the mainland, opium from elsewhere in the empire being the prime "commodity." Needless to say, such a "commodity" fostered a rot deep within Chinese society. It should be no surprise that from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom to the time of the Communist revolutionary struggle, opium was banned by any movement seeking national liberation from imperialist domination.

Culturally, the colony of Hong Kong was used to spread Protestant Christianity on the mainland. Before the nineteenth century, Christianity already had a long history in China, from the time of the Church of the East, or Nestorians (景教 *jingjiao*), in the seventh to the tenth centuries CE, and then the Roman Catholics with Matteo Ricci in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In contrast to the tendency towards sinification (中国化 *zhongguohua*) of Christianity with these earlier efforts, the Protestant missions from the Hong Kong colony tended to be much more concerned with purveying Western European cultural values as part and parcel of their mission work. The colony was certainly a hodgepodge of misfits and freebooters, ranging all the way from James Legge (1815–1897), who spent his years making translations of many Chinese classical texts and converted only one Chinese person to Christianity, to the flamboyant Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851), who not only had a hand in Bible translation, but also had the knack of picking up local dialects, dressing in Chinese clothes, and ranging —illegally—far and wide in the southern parts and "converting" (baptising) many Chinese people on the basis of the barest of information about Christianity. Gützlaff was a man of many talents, whether as interpreter, imperialist administrator, spy, Bible translator, tract writer, and opium smuggler—ostensibly for the purpose of "spreading the word." Unfortunately for Gützlaff, some of the Chinese people he sought to train as missionaries were themselves opium addicts, who simply sold the Bibles and tracts he produced for money (to buy opium).

Through these and many other experiences such as the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom—the largest anti-colonial struggle of the nineteenth century (Boer 2019, 183–199)—and its adoption of a distinct type of Protestant theology, Christianity was increasingly seen as "foreign teaching [洋教 *yangjiao*]" completely at odds with Chinese cultural assumptions. Apart from often being the ideological carapace of Western imperialism, its promotion of ontological or "outer transcendence [外在超越 *waizai chaoyue*]" contrasted with the relational connectedness of Chinese cultural assumptions. Many were the expressions of opposition to Christianity, whether the cruelly suppressed Yihetuan (Boxer) Rebellion of 1899–1901, or the "anti-Christian movement" between 1922 and 1928, which sought government control of the Christian schools throughout China and questioned the loyalty of Chinese Christians.

In all of these developments, the colony of Hong Kong was explicitly and implicitly involved. Forced out of China's hands at gunpoint in the infamous "Treaty of Nanjing" in 1841—one of the many "unequal treaties [不平等条约 *bu pingdeng tiaoyue*]"—it remained a colony from 1841 to 1997, with an interlude during Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945. Despite expansions in 1860 to Kowloon and in 1898 to the New Territories, the colony was never granted any form of self-government or a trace of Western capitalist democracy. The governor was appointed directly from London, held near dictatorial power under direct authority of the British monarch, and appointed all personnel to local governing bodies—the Legislative Council and Legislative Executive Council—of which the governor was also the head. The colony operated in terms of racial segregation, with Chinese people barred from living in certain areas, banned from public buildings, subject to a different legal code for punishments, curfews, imprisonment, flogging, and execution. In short, the "British authorities implemented a policy of coercion, strictly controlled the press and publication, curtailed freedom of speech, implemented racial discrimination against Chinese people, and enforced harsh laws and punishments" (Wu 2021).

In the twentieth century, the colony continued its role as a destabiliser of the mainland. Many were the anti-communists who fled to the colony during the long revolutionary struggle and after Liberation of the mainland in 1949. At this point, however, we encounter a contradiction in the colony's function. On the hand, the colony was born of anti-Chinese

imperialist moves, so it developed a distinct tone of British arrogance and sense of superiority over against Asian peoples. This meant that the colony became an anti-China within China. On the other hand, the small territory's prime concern was trade and business, so it required a relatively stable environment in order to undertake such activities. As the twentieth century unfolded, and especially after China was liberated in 1949, productive relations with the People's Republic were needed so that business could flourish. This growing divide would come to shape the colony's economic and political landscape, playing a major role in the unrest of 2019–2020. The contradiction was manifested at many levels. For example, the level of tolerance of anti-communists went only so far as allowing them a presence and a voice without endangering the fundamental commercial connections with the mainland. Yet, this did not prevent an ever-increasing garrison of British imperial soldiers in the colony, and it certainly did not prevent waves of labour unrest—in 1924–1925, 1960, and 1967—due to atrocious working conditions and the ever-widening split between those who benefited handsomely from the colony's economic ventures and those who did the hard work to enable such ventures.

It was only after the signing of the Joint Declaration on 19 December, 1984, that halfhearted efforts were made to turn the colony into some form of capitalist democracy. These efforts were more in the way of an irritation to the mainland than arising out of any genuine concern for the people. Indirect elections to the Legislative Council were instituted in 1985 and somewhat more direct elections in 1991. The most notable effort was the highly controversial effort to "booby-trap" the return through the attempted political reform of 1995 (SCIO 2021a, 6–7, 2021b, 3). Carried out under the auspices of the last governor of the colony, the proposed reform managed to violate the Joint Declaration, create opposition in England itself from those who saw it as undermining relatively good relations with the mainland, alienate the central government that had negotiated in good faith, and deeply polarise the social and political landscape of the colony before its return to China in 1997. In this failed effort, the last imperial governor had returned the colony to type. Hong Kong's colonial status ended as it had begun: as an Anglo-supremacist outpost designed to make money while trying to destabilise China.

## 10.3 One Country, Two Systems

This section focuses on the development of the pioneering and distinctly dialectical policy of one "country, two systems [一国两制 *yiguo liangzhi*]." The policy was born out of a struggle as to how the colonies of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan island would integrate with the mainland and how their distinct economic systems would work together in the context of a fully reunified and normalised China. In order to set the scene, it is necessary to provide an overview of the negotiation process concerning Hong Kong's return. Although the island itself was in theory leased "in perpetuity," Kowloon and the many islets known as The New Territories had a lease that would expire in 1997.[1] It should be noted that since liberation in 1949, the PRC has never recognised the "unequal treaties" that led to the seizure of the Hong Kong area. The return was simply a matter of time, when the opportunity arose and when China had the internal strength and will to ensure the return. That moment arrived by the time of the launch of the reform and opening-up. Alongside the four modernisations and opposing hegemonism for the sake of peace, the reunification of China's ancestral land (祖国 *zuguo*) was high on the agenda. As Deng Xiaoping observed: "The current situation, both international and domestic, is very favourable to the great cause of the reunification of our country." Further, "The Chinese Government has clearly proclaimed the general principles concerning the return of Taiwan and Hong Kong to the ancestral land" (Deng 1979b, 187–188; see also 1979a).

### 10.3.1 The Negotiation Process

The negotiations were—to say the least—quite arduous.[2] The remnants of British imperialism were reluctant give up any ground at all. Initially, a couple of direct meetings, in 1982 and 1983, took place between Deng Xiaoping and the English prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. These meetings were concerned with general principles. During a second stage, from July 1983 to September 1984, no less than 22 rounds of negotiations were held between negotiating teams from the two sides. Deng Xiaoping—the man known as a "needle hidden in silk floss [绵里藏针 *mianli cangzhen*]" (Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 2003, 1674)—has the distinction having worn down someone no less than Thatcher and

having not retreated a millimetre. Deng had proposed that China would recover the whole area of Hong Kong, that it would be a special administrative region, that Hong Kong people would run their own affairs, and that its capitalist economic and social system would be allowed to continue for the foreseeable future. There should have been no surprise on these matters, since they had been deliberated upon in the National People's Congress, identified in article 31 of the revised constitution of 1982 concerning special administrative regions, and by early 1983 had been elaborated in terms of the "Twelve Principles" (NPC 1982, article 31; SCIO 2014a, 2–3, 2014b, 2). Despite this clarity, Thatcher still tried, but failed, to insist that China should "honour" the former treaties, to which Deng replied that the PRC has never recognised the "unequal treaties." The British also tried to resist China's claim to sovereignty over the entire Hong Kong area. On this too the British gave way, and in March 1983 Thatcher begrudgingly agreed to consider the transfer of sovereignty.

Detailed negotiations could at last proceed, with delegations from both sides beginning the process from July 1983. They did not get off to a good start, with the British side refusing to relinquish administration and proposing the illogical idea that sovereignty could be exchanged for administration. Four rounds of talks made no progress. By September of 1983, Thatcher had been ousted and John Major had become the English prime minister. Deng intervened once again in September of 1983 and told Major in no uncertain terms that both sovereignty and administration would return to China, and that if the British side continued to be obstructive China would institute unilateral policies for the return of Hong Kong. By the next month, the British side relented once again, and more substantive negotiations could finally get underway.

They were not easy, as the 18 negotiations over a relatively short period of time indicate. It would be best to list the main Chinese positions and the British obstructions.

| **Chinese position** | **British obstruction** |
|---|---|
| 1. China would "resume the exercise of sovereignty" over HKSAR | Continued objections and attempts to propose alternative wording |
| 2. HKSAR to have "high degree of autonomy," directly under Central Government authority | HKSAR should have "maximum autonomy," and thus not be under the control of the PRC Central Government |

| Chinese position | British obstruction |
|---|---|
| 3. Central Government to control foreign affairs and defence, with a garrison of the PLA stationed in HKSAR | Repeated objections to PLA garrison in HKSAR |
| 4. HKSAR local government to be composed of local inhabitants, with British and foreign nationals restricted to being advisers or hold posts no higher than the level of deputy secretary | British nationals should hold posts up to the highest level of the civil service |
| 5. Diplomatic representation at the level of "consul-general" | "British high commissioner" to be appointed to HKSAR |
| 6. Transition period to be managed by a joint Chinese-British body | Obstruction to the establishment of a joint Chinese-British body and the concept of a "transition period" |
| 7. No changes to be made after negotiations were completed, with China reserving the right to abrogate any changes | China should accept any changes made after negotiations and take over the system "intact" |

It should be clear by now that the Chinese negotiators had almost infinite patience and that British side was seeking to turn Hong Kong into a semi-independent or even independent entity under British influence and control. Given China's insistence on anti-colonial sovereignty, and that these measures would undermine China's opposition to imperialist hegemony, all of the British obstructions were rejected. At particular sticking points, such as the establishment of a Joint Commission for overseeing the transition period, Deng Xiaoping had to intervene to overcome the blockage. Eventually, the final wording of what would become the *Joint Declaration* included the following: "The Government of the People's Republic of China … has decided to resume the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong with effect from 1 July 1997. The Government of the United Kingdom declares that it will restore Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China with effect from 1 July 1997." Finally, on 19 December, 1984, the heads of the two governments signed the *Joint Declaration*, which was ratified on 27 May, 1985. Once this was in place, the careful and lengthy process of drafting the *Basic Law of the Hong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China* could begin (SCIO 2014a, 3–4, 2014b, 3). The drafting committee involved people from Hong Kong and the mainland, and through many rounds of public meetings and discussion received 80,000 suggestions from people from all walks of life. Almost five years later it was completed and the National People's Congress passed the Basic Law in April 1990 (NPC

1990). As we have seen earlier, even the *Joint Declaration* and the *Basic Law* did not stop British efforts to undermine the process, especially with the failed and highly divisive effort to institute wide-ranging changes in the political structures on the eve of Hong Kong's return to the mainland.

### 10.3.2 The Dialectic of "One Country, Two Systems"

In the concrete circumstances of the enhanced project of reunification, Deng Xiaoping developed the innovative dialectical position of "one country, two systems [一国两制 *yiguo liangzhi*]." The approach arises from the tradition of dialectical materialism as it encountered dialectical assumptions within China's own philosophical and cultural tradition—as Deng made clear (1987a, 218; 1987b, 217, 1984c, 107, 1984j, 101). To clarify, the four character phrase is actually a contraction of a fuller phrase, 一个国家, 两种制度 *yi ge guojia, liang zhong zhidu*, with the more literal meaning of "one country, two types of system" (Deng 1984e, 1984h). At this point, a profound—and perhaps wilful—misrepresentation has arisen among declining Western countries. They tend to see the "systems" in question in political terms, with Hong Kong SAR, as well as Macao SAR and Taiwan island, having capitalist political systems, while the mainland has a socialist political system. Why is this a misrepresentation? For Deng Xiaoping and his comrades, the political reality is encapsulated in the phrase "one country [一国 *yiguo*]." Hong Kong SAR is part of the overall governance system of China, and thus an internal affair of China itself and not the concern of other countries. This also means that China's rule of law and legal system provide the framework for Hong Kong SAR, and that its high degree of autonomy is derived from the central government and not inherent (SCIO 2014a, 17, 2014b, 12). In other words, Hong Kong SAR is part of one sovereign country with inviolable borders (Deng 1982a, 23, 1982b, 12, 1984f, 91, 1984i, 84;).

It follows that the "two systems [两制 *liangzhi*]" refers to socio-economic realities. Hong Kong during its colonial domination developed as a capitalist system within the British Empire. So also did Macao as a colony in the Portuguese Empire, and Taiwan island under Japanese and US imperialist control. Thus, for a reasonable period of time after return to China, they would continue as capitalist micro-systems, encapsulated within but also distinct from the socialist economic system of China: "The

‘two systems’ means that, within the ‘one country’ the main body of the country practices a socialist system [社会主义制度 *shehuizhuyi zhidu*], while Hong Kong and some other regions practice a capitalist system [资本主义制度 *zibenzhuyi zhidu*]” (SCIO 2014a, 17, 2014b, 12).[3] It should be obvious that the two socio-economic systems are not equal in status. In many respects, this is a question of size: Hong Kong SAR is no larger than a mid-level Chinese city in terms of population, with Macao SAR little larger than a town. Only Taiwan island would constitute in terms of size a province. Thus, the “Chinese mainland’s adherence to a socialist system is the prerequisite and guarantee for Hong Kong’s practise of a capitalist system and the maintenance of its stability and prosperity” (SCIO 2014a, 17, 2014b, 12; see also Cheng L. 2021a). Further, it is up to the main socialist system of China to designate a few “special regions [特殊地区 *teshu diqu*]” that can retain their capitalist systems for a while, even up to a century, while the bulk of the country would continue on the socialist path (Deng 1987a, 219; 1987b, 218; see also 1984e, 69, 1984h, 59). Eventually, the special administrative regions too will join the socialist path.

This is not to say that there would not be problems. It is a staple of Chinese Marxism that contradictions continue during socialist construction and that such contradictions—specifically with regard to the special administrative regions—need to be managed so as to prevent damage from the capitalist SARs and ensure that they contribute even now to the socialist whole of China (Li et al. 1994, 59). At the time of writing, the sharp point in this formulation concerns Taiwan island and US efforts at aggravation. Deng’s approach to the Taiwan question shows even greater flexibility, allowing for the possibility that the island would be able to maintain its armed forces for a while. But he also insisted that the PRC would never relinquish the option of using military means to achieve reunification and normalise the situation (Deng 1984a, 59, 1984f, 93, 1984g, 49; 1984i, 86–87). In relation to Hong Kong SAR, Deng was fully aware of the risk of political disturbances. In light of the belated efforts to impose a semblance of Western capitalist democracy on Hong Kong SAR, Deng observed that “no Western system can be copied in toto,” and that the assessment of Hong Kong SAR’s democratic development should not be assessed by a Western yardstick (Deng 1987a, 220; 1987b, 218–219). Instead, it should be assessed by its own criteria in light of its own concrete conditions as part of the People’s Republic of China. To emphasise this point, Deng indicated

that the Hong Kong SAR administrators should be competent and committed to China, and that their selection would require a two-step process of initial elections by candidates who meet the above criteria and then appointment by the central government (Deng 1984b, 74; 1984d, 82; 1987a, 220; 1987b, 219). These principles were fully enshrined in the Basic Law, which was promulgated in 1990 and came into effect in 1997 (NPC 1990).

Finally, Deng Xiaoping was astute enough to foresee the potential for future disturbances, well after the return of Hong Kong to China. The initial return may have been a manifestation of the dialectical materialist principle of the unity and identity of opposites (Fan 2000, 2), but the struggle of opposites would by no means disappear (Zhou 1997, 127). In concrete terms, Deng knew full well that internal dynamics in Hong Kong SAR, aided and abetted by external forces, would seek to create problems. In short, he anticipated that Hong Kong's old role as a lever deployed by foreign actors to destabilise China would no doubt return at some point. Thus, he insisted that the Central Government would, if needed, intervene in cases of sabotage and separatism to ensure stability, peace, and harmony (Deng 1982a, 25, 1982b, 14; 1984b, 73–75; 1984d, 81–83; 1987a, 220–221; 1987b, 219–220).

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## 10.4 The Deep-Seated Contradictions of a Capitalist Enclave

Earlier, I mentioned that the belated efforts by the last British colonial governor to undermine the political structures of Hong Kong—through capitalist democratic "reforms"—on the eve of its return produced deep divides and polarisation. This is only partly true, for the failed measures simply brought to the surface existing contradictions and tensions. In this section, I identify the deeper contradictions that had developed in the colony, tensions that were then exacerbated after 1997.

### 10.4.1 The Colonial Era

In terms of the economic base, Hong Kong colony was developed as a trading and financial hub in Asia so as to advance British imperial interests. Opium was the first of many commodities traded through the port. The

interest of the colony in the nineteenth century was to shift the "balance of trade" in the British Empire's favour, through economic persuasion and military force. By that time, the British Empire—the last of the European empires—had learned the hard lessons from the first of such empires, the Dutch and their *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), or East India Company. The model entailed identifying and ensuring the supply of raw materials for the sake of what was then an efficient and modernised industry in the colonial centre. With low pay, long working hours, and high levels of machinery, finished products could be produced in British factories at a fraction of the cost of labour-intensive industries elsewhere. Ideally, the British fought tooth and nail for closed monopolies over both the sources of raw materials and the "markets" to which they sold the finished products. This was easier in parts of the world they had invaded and occupied, and where they had managed to enact genocide on the local populations. It was more complex in parts of the world, such as China, where they were unable to to do. The colony in Hong Kong became a transit point for the flow of raw materials and finished products for China and elsewhere in eastern Asia. Much like the colony in Singapore, the port of Hong Kong became one of the busiest in the world. It also played a significant role in enabling the transit of certain items between other parts of the empire. Opium and tea are the most notable, but there were many others.

With trade came the inescapable need for financial transactions. Currencies needed to be converted, banks and customs houses needed to be attuned the flow of goods and personnel, and favourable conditions were required for their smooth operation. Hong Kong colony developed into what we would now call a special or free economic zone, with minimal taxes and "red tape" to encourage enterprises, and a tolerance of the more shady types of business. It should be no surprise that the colony was also a hub for organised crime, especially since it was founded on imperial drug trafficking.

When we turn to the relations of production, we find that class was overlaid with colonial and racial factors. The British ruling elite, inevitably drawn from the more derelict parts of the old aristocracy and gentry, is the most obvious manifestation of class dominance. It was, however, warped in the usual direction of colonial ventures. As Marx already observed in the middle of the nineteenth century: "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes, turning

from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked" (Marx 1853, 252). Lenin too spoke of the manifest brutality of the "most Liberal and Radical personalities of free Britain" when they were posted to the colonies (Lenin 1908a, 178, 1908b, 184). Beyond the British ruling elite, we may identify the following class fractions. To begin with, there was an aspiring group of Chinese business people. Over time, they were able to accumulate considerable amounts of capital and own significant tracts of the scarce real estate. During the colonial era, they were blocked from actual levers of power, but were granted subordinate roles in the ruling class structures. Their class consciousness, as a sub-fraction of the ruling class, was shaped by identifying with conservative strands of Christianity (and with significant contact with Malaysian Chinese Christians), and by an effort to be more British than their colonial overlords. As a personal note, I have in the past been hosted by such people to an elaborate "high tea" at an expensive hotel, been treated to "fish and chips," and to "scones and cream." This was during the initial phase of Hong Kong SAR, after the return to China. Such a superficial and extreme "Britishness" was inescapably linked with a hankering for the colonial days and a virulent anti-communism. These manifestations of class consciousness seem absurd, for it was precisely this group that was systemically denied access to power and seen as inferior in racial terms by the British ruling elite.

The contradictions of this identity were many, but perhaps the most notable was the growth of an internal racism. Among the more wealthy of Hong Kong residents, there developed a form of racism against people from the mainland. "土 *tu*" they called the mainlanders, a derogatory term literally meaning "earth," and thus "uncultured peasants." Obviously, this term—also found on Taiwan island—is overlaid with the class assumptions of comprador capitalists in relation to peasants from the time of revolutionary struggle and civil war. Here the politics of script also played a significant role. The colony of Hong Kong, like Taiwan island, insisted on continuing the use the traditional Chinese script (繁体 *fanti*), or at least the form of standardised script before the reforms of the first part of the twentieth century. Even though moves to what is known as the simplified script (简体 *jianti*) predate the reforms of the CPC, in Hong Kong colony the simplified script was seen as a "communist plot" to downgrade the language and cut off China's traditional roots. In education, literature, and culture, the traditional script in Hong Kong SAR was seen as the

“authentic” script and the simplified script an “inauthentic” one. If I add that the simplified script was also a crucial step towards towards universal literacy for common people, then it should be clear how much the advocacy of the traditional script was a manifestation of class and racial consciousness. These developments continued into the period when Hong Kong became a special administrative region, with claims emerging that a “Hongkonger” has a different national identity to “Chinese.”

Workers in the colony of Hong Kong have not only found themselves sandwiched between these contradictions and tensions, but have also historically borne the region’s prosperity on their backs. During the colonial era, the British made the most of the Qing Empire’s increasing economic woes during the last stages of its decline and sought to attract labourers from the mainland to work in atrocious conditions. It suffices only to recall nineteenth century practices in English factories—so clearly presented Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845a, 1845b) and in Marx’s *Capital* (1867a, 1867b)—with extraordinarily long working days, child labour, poor conditions, overwork, and widespread maiming and death from lack of safety. In the colonies it was even worse. To be added here is the fact that the colony of Hong Kong also attracted labourers from other Asian countries in the vicinity, who made up a sub-class of partially employed workers—or rather, semi-slaves—who worked as household servants for the ruling class, piecework labourers on the wharves, and hapless couriers for smugglers. Prostitution was also extremely widespread, with the women and men overwhelmingly drawn from countries other than the UK and China. At this level, the inherent racism of Hong Kong’s colonial structure found its most virulent expression. They came in at the lowest rung, below the British and Hong Kong Chinese, and were treated accordingly.

### 10.4.2 The SAR Period

Contradictions there were aplenty, but Hong Kong managed to stave off a reckoning during the first couple of decades as a special administrative region so as to become known as one of the “four Asian dragons [亚洲四条龙 *Yazhou si tiao long*].” An outwardly open capitalist economy, with minimal rules for foreign direct investment, coupled with one of the busiest hubs in the world for trade and finance, meant that Hong Kong SAR was dubbed “the Eastern pearl [东方之珠 *dongfang zhi zhu*].”

Economic problems were brewing below the surface. To begin with, Hong Kong developed into what may be called an "oligarchic economy [寡头经济 *guatou jingji*]" with capitalist private ownership, and thus entered the stage of "oligopoly capitalism [寡头垄断资本主义 *guatou longduan zibenzhuyi*]" (Cheng and Ren 2019, 3).[4] The economy was increasingly concentrated into four family enterprises. The largest is that of Li Ka-shing (李嘉诚 *Li Jiacheng*), established by the patriarch of that name (born 1928) and covering an extraordinary range of businesses: real estate, ports, hotels, telecommunications, retail, energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, building materials, investment, life sciences, and media industries. The joke in Hong Kong SAR is that everyone begins working for Li Ka-shing from the moment they open their eyes in the morning. The remaining three—Lee Shau-kee (李兆基 *Li Zhaoji*), Cheng Yu-tung (郑裕彤 *Zheng Yutong*), and Kwok Tak-seng (郭得胜 *Guo Desheng*)—have slightly less but still impressive coverage over real estate, energy supplies, banking, logistics, department stores, and public transport.

Further factors that warped this oligopoly capitalism were the drives to financialisation and "globalisation" as features of the now failed neoliberal experiment from 1978 to 2008. In Hong Kong SAR, the limited internal space for capitalist markets and the pressure towards a virtual or fictitious economy in terms of financial speculation led the area into becoming the key financial hub of Asia. This may have seemed like a beneficial development at the time, but it made Hong Kong SAR vulnerable to financial disruptions. The much-touted capitalist "globalisation" actually meant a far greater role for US-led capitalist oligarchs in the local economy. With significant investment and joint ventures, foreign business personnel increased their presence and influence. Along with embassy and spying personnel, far greater access to Western countries was provided for Hong Kong businesses, along with educational opportunities for their children.

Through all of these activities, Hong Kong SAR's economy seemed to be booming. On the surface, the overall GDP and per capita GDP increased from 1997 to 2017. However, this growth was lacklustre when compared with Macao SAR

| | **2000** | **2018** | **Percentage growth** |
|---|---|---|---|
| HKSAR GDP | USD 165.7 billion | USD 362.95 billion | 119.04% |

| | 2000 | 2018 | Percentage growth |
|---|---|---|---|
| HKSAR per capita GDP | USD 25,800 | USD 48,700 | 88.76% |
| Macao SAR GDP | USD 6.72 billion | USD 54.55 billion | 711.68% |
| Macao SAR per capita GDP | USD 15,710 | USD 86,400 | 449.97% |

Macao SAR was clearly developing from a much smaller base than Hong Kong SAR, but we need to remember that the population of Macao today is 650,000, while that of Hong Kong is 7.6 million. The key lies in the percentage increases and in the per capita GDP. In 2000, the per capita GDP of Macao SAR was half that of Hong Kong SAR; by 2018 Macao had doubled that of Hong Kong.

Further, the warped capitalist economy of Hong Kong SAR began to reveal its problems by early 2018, as the following graph indicates (Fig. 10.1).

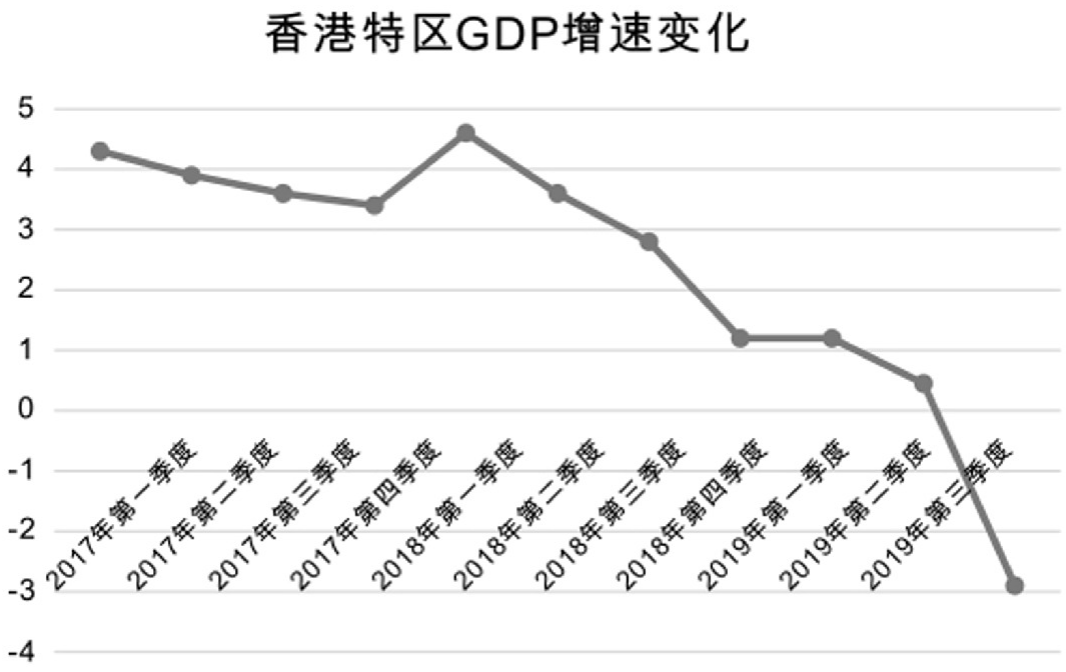


***Fig. 10.1*** Quarterly GDP figures for Hong Kong SAR 2017–2019 (Cheng and Ren 2019, 4)

To interpret the graph: it concerns the changing pattern of GDP growth and decline from the first quarter of 2017 to the third quarter of 2019 (each tilted script at the bottom of the graph represents one such quarter of the year). Through 2017, the economy was clearly stagnating, but the real decline begins with the first quarter of 2018, with the GDP falling from

about 4.5 percent growth in the first quarter to one percent by the fourth quarter. Importantly, this decline set in before the riots of 2019 and their profound economic effect. Thus, while the riots and violence contributed to Hong SAR's economic troubles—sending it into recession by the end of 2019—they were not the cause of the difficulties. In other words, the manifestations of economic contradictions and the earlier decline provides the economic foundation for the riots and violence that began in 2019.

Why did the stagnation and decline not begin earlier? Hong Kong SAR was hit by the financial turmoil in Asia at the end of the 1990s, by the SARS epidemic in 2003, and by the capitalist financial crisis of 2008–2009. Given its significant financialisation and exposure to capitalist globalisation, Hong SAR was very vulnerable. In the late 1990s, the People's Bank of China came to the rescue when Hong Kong was under attack by financial speculators trying to undermine its dollar. The mainland once again ensured stability in 2003, and in 2008–2009, when many capitalist economies flat-lined, the practice of the People's Bank of China was well established and it was once again engaged in ensuring stability in Hong Kong SAR (SCIO 2014a, 12–13, 2014b, 9). These were, however, stop-gap measures that were propping up an oligopoly capitalism that could not be sustained.

A further factor on the mainland also played a role in 1990s and into the first decade of the new century. The region returned to China at the tail end of the "wild 90s" on the mainland. During this period and its extremely unbalanced and uneven development, there was a growing gap between rich and poor regions, illegal appropriation of village lands as cities spread, a whole new group of workers moving to cities for temporary labour, workers losing their secure jobs, scant concern for environmental matters, and a deep rift between the Communist Party and the common people, leading to corruption and little knowledge of Marxism even among leading cadres. Chinese scholars and policy documents have transparently assessed these problems and sought—at the time—many ways to address them (see Sect. 9.2.4). That many of them now have indeed been addressed is obvious, but at the time of Hong Kong's return the process was only beginning. The mainland had its hands more than busy with the need to solve the many problems that had arisen, so it was able to introduce only stop-gap measures to deal with Hong Kong SAR's challenges.

By now I have moved to the effects of the warped economic system in Hong Kong SAR on the common people. As with all capitalist systems, high polarisation is to be expected. Hong Kong SAR provides an extreme example, as the following statistics illustrate. The wealth of the top ten Hong Kong billionaires accounted for 35 percent of the region's GDP, while the number of people living in poverty was more than 20 percent (1,376, 600 of the total population) in late 2018. At the same time, the Gini coefficient hit a half-century high of 0.539, which is in the zone of severe polarisation and social unrest. Further, real estate prices had seen astronomical growth. For example, from 2004 to 2013 real estate prices rose by 135 percent, while per capita GDP rose only 28 percent. By 2016, the ratio of housing prices to incomes reached 18.1 times, making it the most unaffordable city in Asia for seven consecutive years. Apart from the direct effect of cost of living on consumption, education also had become prohibitively expensive, let alone the cost of raising a child. By 2018, the cost of educating one child had risen to HKD 5.5 million (Cheng and Ren 2019, 5).

By way of example: when I first visited Hong Kong SAR a few years after the return, I noticed large gatherings of women, who were sitting in parks and other public locations. When I asked my host what they were doing, he replied that this was the one day of the week when foreign domestic workers had some leisure time. Since they were paid so little, all they could do was meet in public, talk, and share some food they had brought along. This was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg: organised crime remained a problem, prostitution was widespread, wages remained lacklustre, and property tycoons kept a stranglehold on the region's scarce accommodation so as to ensure some of the highest prices in the world. I have seen homeless people forced to construct makeshift shelters on the roofs of high-rise buildings. It should be no surprise that young people in Hong Kong SAR, even those with jobs, were forced to live with their parents far longer than the norm. Many had little to no hope of finding reasonably paid work and became fertile ground for long-cultivated extreme views.

To sum up: the development of oligopoly capitalism, financialisation, and capitalist globalisation; sluggish economic growth, stagnation, and then decline from early 2018; extreme economic polarisation, astronomical housing costs, and a city full of the poor and homeless; and very limited

opportunities for young people who stayed in the city. It is a surprise that the unrest, riots, and violence of 2019–2020 did not erupt sooner.

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## 10.5 The Hong Kong Storm: Terrorism, Extremism, and Separatism

In the previous section, I outlined the economic contradictions of the capitalist enclave of Hong Kong SAR, since they provided the basis for the storm, or "wind and waves [风波 *fengbo*]" that erupted in 2019. I have done so since Chinese Marxist scholars work with a major methodological premise that arises from dialectical materialism: contradictions internal to a process are the drivers of qualitative change, while external factors produce quantitative change. Of course, external factors can influence processes, but only when internal factors are in a state of tension, when opposites are engaged in struggle. This relevance of this methodological point should already be obvious in relation to the previous section, and it applies even more to what is to come.

### 10.5.1 The Storm

The events that unfolded in 2019–2020 are well-known. I was in China when the violence erupted and noted that Chinese news services provided factual and comprehensive information about what was actually happening. By contrast, Western "news" engaged in a comprehensive distortion and misrepresentation in a manner that has become all too familiar: the riots, violence, and widespread destruction by the rioters, including the production and use of explosives and weapons, were ignored. Instead, the rioters were presented as "peaceful protesters" demanding Western style "democracy" in the face of "police brutality." Those who are familiar with this "empire of lies" could see what was happening, although those in Western countries who suffer "propaganda fatigue" simply absorbed such lies into a distorted worldview.

The excuse for the violence was a proposed amendment to an extradition agreement with the mainland, seeking to fill a glaring legal gap. From June of 2019, protesters hit the streets, surrounding the Legislative Council Building, the Police Headquarters, and other government institutions. Any site—including news services—in the city that represented

integration between the mainland and Hong Kong SAR was repeatedly attacked, with much physical damage. Hong Kong police officers were "doxxed," meaning that they and their families were identified for attack on social media, their bank accounts and personal details hacked, and calls were made for violence against them. Politicians in the Legislative Council who were seen as favouring the mainland were targeted in a similar manner. Public infrastructure, such as metro stations and lines, as well as access to the airport and the cross-harbour tunnel, was also attacked, vandalised, and regularly shut down. In the process, some common people were killed (SCIO 2021a, 28–29, 2021b, 9). Not only were these attacks seen as an affront to the basic assumptions of stability, safety, and harmony (see the previous chapter), but they were also seen as insults to the country's dignity, as a direct challenge to the authority of the central government, and thus a serious effort to undermine the principle of "one country, two systems."

How did external forces seek to capitalise on the unrest? The contours of a "colour counter-revolution" were soon identified (Tian 2021; SCIO 2021a, 1, 2021b, 2).[5] After the "dress rehearsal" in Beijing in June of 1989 (Losurdo 2015, 191–194), many countries in the world have become all too familiar with the template of "colour counter-revolutions," as well as the intensification of violence, destruction, and death, from the time of the 2014 "Euromaidan" coup in Ukraine. This was also the case in Hong Kong SAR of 2019, where Western politicians, ambassadors, "non-government organisations," and funding bodies had already been active for some time in cultivating the anti-China forces in Hong Kong SAR.[6] Massive amounts of funding, logistics, spying, and training had been flowing into Hong Kong SAR for quite a few years. However, these efforts at external interference can have an effect only when internal conditions are ripe: economic contradictions (see above), a vocal opposition with access to news and social media, and an ability to call up people for acts of disruption when needed. These internal conditions were present in Hong Kong SAR, with the riots soon escalating to the level of seeking power through a coup.

The economic damage that resulted from the riots, violence, and destruction was already evident after a few months. Tourism, commodity sales, services, and the stock market all experienced a severe downturn. Unemployment rose dramatically, in what was soon termed an "economic typhoon [经济台风 *jingji taifeng*]."

### 10.5.2 Political Causes

The manifold economic problems (see Sect. 10.4.2) that provided the foundations for the Hong Kong storm were coupled with a number of political factors. These turned on the question: what is the most appropriate democratic structure for Hong Kong SAR? The answer to this question has two parts. First, for the first time in its history Hong Kong began to develop a distinct form of democracy only after it returned to China (SCIO 2021b, 3–6; 2021a, 8–18). This democratic structure was developed, through trial and error, in light of its specific characteristics, and it was fostered by the central government in Beijing. Thus, the efforts of anti-China forces to establish a Western style political system in Hong Kong SAR was a diversion from its natural course of political development.

Second, a Western style capitalist democracy—as promoted by the anti-China forces—would be an ill fit with the socialist democracy of the mainland. Now, one may argue that since Hong Kong SAR has a capitalist economic system, it should be able to develop a capitalist democracy. But this is where a contradiction arises within the framework of "one country, two systems." Let me put it this way: while a socialist democracy develops in terms of non-antagonistic contradictions, with a significant emphasis on consultative processes and de-politicised elections, a Western capitalist democracy is by nature antagonistic. Within this political structure, every possible item is politicised, becoming a "political football" so as to score points against the opposing political parties. This basic contradiction between two qualitatively distinct forms of democracy arose within the framework of one country. Further, the internal antagonism of politics in Hong Kong SAR was increasingly framed in terms of relations with the mainland. One the one side were business and bourgeois interests who saw the clear benefit of working smoothly with the mainland. By far the main form of trade is with the mainland, and a vast number of mutually beneficial economic connections had developed—apart from the mainland's notable efforts in coming to Hong Kong SAR's rescue in the late 1990s, 2003, and 2008–2009. On the other side were those who sought to seize power and separate Hong Kong from the mainland. Aided and abetted by Taiwanese and Western anti-China forces, they disregarded the economic and social cost and sought to inflict as much damage as possible so as to achieve their aims. Although this polarisation had been long in the making, it reached it apogee in 2019–2021, resulting in an abnormal or "lopsided

political ecology [政治生态畸形 *zhengzhi shengtai jixing*]" (Cheng and Ren 2019, 2). That this distorted political environment, arising from the deep economic problems, would be exploited by Western anti-China forces was to be expected.

This political contradiction within the one country framework would require an innovative solution, especially since Hong Kong SAR was the first region in the world to be administered in terms of "one country, two systems." I will deal with the solution soon enough, but before doing so a couple of other problems relating to the judicial system and education need to be identified.

### 10.5.3 Judicial System and Education

In terms of the judicial system, Hong Kong SAR still had a type of "separation of powers" analogous to Western political structures. There was also a prevalence of non-Chinese judges in the judicial system. For example, in the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal, the appointment of seventeen permanent and non-permanent judges in 2016 included only two Chinese judges. The remainder were foreigners, primarily British. Despite all of the talk about judicial independence, it became clear from the time of the "Occupy central" activities of 2014 that the judges would more often than not make decisions concerning protesters and police that reflected their educational, cultural, and political assumptions based on "Western values." Decisions repeatedly favoured anti-China forces and undermined trust in the judicial system in Hong Kong SAR.

In educational settings, Hong Kong SAR inherited Western approaches, focusing on the deceptive "universal values" promoted by the West and ignoring the specific features of Chinese and regional history and culture. Universities showed a distinct propensity to appoint lecturers and professors who espoused and deployed Western educational models and methods, under the banner of "freedom of intellectual expression." Needless to say, the socialist system on the mainland was denigrated in the process. In high schools, a major point of contention arose concerning the "Liberal Education" curriculum. The curriculum was quite flexible, with scope for teachers to fill the content with anti-China and anti-communist content. In the protests and riots, it was noticeable that a significant number of high school and university students took part, so it is no surprise that the

curriculum and the teachers involved became the focus of attention in the much overdue process of curriculum reform that began in 2021.

The sum up, the “Hong Kong storm” of 2019–2020 had deep economic roots in an oligopoly capitalism, a sluggish economy, limited opportunities for young people, a dubious judiciary, an unreformed educational system, and a profound contradiction between the non-antagonistic shape of socialist democracy on the mainland and the effort to establish an antagonistic Western style capitalist democracy by anti-China forces. In light of all these conditions, the “storm” was in many respects overdue.

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## 10.6 Rule-Of-Law Solution

The challenge for a workable solution within the framework of “one country, two systems” was immense. How would a non-antagonistic and harmonious approach to political structures be achieved, especially in light of the socialist and capitalist economic systems of the mainland and Hong Kong SAR? It is clear that the anti-China forces in Hong Kong SAR, on Taiwan island, and in the West expected and indeed hoped for an intervention by the PLA garrison to restore order. A repeat of the events of 1989 in Beijing would play into the hands of anti-China forces. While the PLA garrison did undertake routine duties and followed the schedule of regular changes in personnel, it did not intervene. Notably, the central government and mainland police constantly stated that the Hong Kong SAR police were capable of dealing with the situation, although it was also observed that there were plenty of further resources should the situation get completely out of hand.

Meanwhile, studies began to identify a full spectrum of problems that needed to be addressed (Cheng and Ren 2019, 5–7). Economic proposals included the need to work hard so as to overcome the vast income disparity and sluggish economic performance, improve the role of governance in easing cost of living problems, and develop further the integrated “Greater Bay Area [大港区 *dagangqu*].” Including the centres of the Pearl River Delta—Shenzhen, Macao, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong—the project is well on the way to becoming a major global economic driver (Li 2019). Urgent too was the need for political measures to deal with the extreme polarisation, along with comprehensive educational and judicial reform. The main theme that ran through these proposals was the need to improve

communication and interaction between the central government and Hong Kong SAR, as well as a focus on Hong Kong people who "love the country [爱国 *aiguo*]" governing Hong Kong so as to lead to productive and non-antagonistic relations (SCIO 2014b, 13–14; 2014a, 19–20; Wen 2021a).[7]

Many of these short-term and long-team measures have begun, with some already implemented. However, the main solution was both unexpected and took anti-China forces completely by surprise. This was a rule-of-law solution, embodied in the Hong Kong National Security Law. This solution was unexpected only for those who have not paid attention to the significant developments in rule of law, in governing the country according to law, that have taken place in China over the last decade. And they would not have been surprised if they had considered the fact that article 23 of the *Basic Law* had not been ratified by the Hong Kong SAR Legislative Council. The article states that Hong Kong SAR shall enact laws to deal with treason, secession, sedition, and subversion of the Central Government, as well as prohibiting foreign forces from interfering with internal processes and collaborating with groups that seek to do so. The anti-China forces in Hong Kong SAR had used all manner of tactics to prevent article 23 from being ratified (Wen 2021c). Obviously, this loophole needed attention. Further, there were earlier analyses and policy decisions relating to Annex III of the Basic Law of Hong Kong SAR, which lists mainland laws that are also applicable and leaves room for additional laws (NPC 1990). The crucial step forward had been the National Security Law of the PRC, which not only mentions Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR (NPC 2015, article 40), but should also—it was argued—be included in Annex III of the Basic Law of Hong Kong SAR (Wang 2016). Obviously, the Hong Kong National Security Law of 2021 did not emerge from a vacuum.

The process for producing the law itself was comprehensive and deeply democratic. There was an effective deployment of the relatively new consultative process for legislative development. Begun in 2014, the three-level system has national, provincial, and city levels, with a focus on grassroots contact points.[8] At this very local level, we find hearings, panels, feasibility studies, and more, so as to nurture proposals from the ground up as well gain feedback for legislative drafts. The mechanism itself ensures a comprehensive process, with the "Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic for Protecting National

Security" finalised and made public by the National People's Congress Standing Committee on 30 June, 2020 (NPC 2020). The Law would come into effect on 1 January, 2021.

The law itself is carefully crafted, with most of the attention given to—as one would expect—judicial processes, police processes, stipulations for punishments (length of imprisonment) depending on the severity of the crime, ameliorated sentences, and the establishment of appropriate bodies to implement the new law. The last item is particularly important, since a law needs robust mechanisms to ensure its uniform enactment. Apart from the National Security Commission, which plays a positive role in promoting the law, liaising with other bodies, and overseeing the whole process with its channels of responsibility and oversight, there is also an Office for the Protection of National Security, which works in connection with the local national security office, the liaison office, commissioner of foreign affairs, and the PLA garrison. Notably, while all personnel of the Office for the Protection of National Security in Hong Kong SAR are subject to the local laws, when carrying out the duties of this office national laws take priority —but do not override—those of Hong Kong SAR. Why? This office deals with severe cases that involve foreign interference, matters that Hong Kong SAR is unable to manage, and major threats to national security (NPC 2020, article 55). In short, this is a careful and detailed improvement of the legal system of Hong Kong SAR in a way that aligns with that of the PRC.

As for the specific crimes, there are four: (1) secession, or the "crime of dividing the country [分裂国家罪 *fenlie guojiazui*]," whether separating Hong Kong SAR or any other region from China, seeking to change the legal status, or trying to put it under the jurisdiction of a foreign power; (2) subversion, or the "crime of incitement to overthrow the state [颠覆国家罪 *dianfuguojiazui*]," including overthrowing the constitution, an organ of the central government or Hong Kong SAR, obstructing and undermining such organs of governance, and damaging places where these organs carry out their duties; (3) terrorism, or the "crime of terrorist activities [恐怖活动罪 *kongbu huodong zui*]," which—note carefully—includes violence against persons, use of weapons, destruction of infrastructure and its electronic control systems, and endangering public health and safety; (4) the "crime of colluding with foreign or cross-border forces to endanger national security [勾结外国或者境外势力危害国家安全罪 *goujie waiguo huozhe jingwai shili weihai guojia anquan zui*]," which includes a full gamut of activities

such as obstructing the implementation of laws, interfering with internal political processes, imposing sanctions and blockades, and arousing hatred against China. The last category also includes foreign actors, who are liable for prosecution. While it is easy to see how these crimes respond to the specific realities of the Hong Kong "storm" of 2019–2020, they are applicable across the country. In short, these crimes constitute treason, and one will find even stronger laws in many countries so as to safeguard national security.

The Hong Kong National Security Law also stipulates tasks for the local government of Hong Kong SAR, especially in completing its internal security laws, and reforming and strengthening the judiciary, education, media, publicity, public organisations, and the internet. Apart from the obvious need to "close loopholes in Hong Kong's system for safeguarding national security and cut off the 'black hands' of domestic and foreign hostile forces" (Zhong 2021a), what is the ultimate purpose of this National Security Law? It is to "maintain the prosperity and stability [稳定 *wending*] of Hong Kong SAR and to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its residents," since "safeguarding China's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity" is the obligation of all Chinese people, including those in Hong Kong. In other words, the law's purpose is to continue and indeed improve the practice of the two principles of "one country, two systems" and "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong [港人治港 *gangren zhigang*]" (NPC 2020, article 1).

I have taken some with the Hong Kong SAR National Security Law, since it is a rather extraordinary and highly successful piece of legislation. After it came into effect at the beginning of 2021, the unrest, protests, and riots faded away, nefarious foreigners and their money fled with unseemly haste (albeit not without an occasional self-righteous pronouncement), ringleaders escaped where possible, the apprehended awaited their sentences, and—by far the most important—the ordinary people of Hong Kong SAR could finally breathe a sigh of relief and get on with their lives. While the new law generated debate concerning its relation with the Basic Law of Hong Kong SAR (Cao 2021; Zheng 2021), many described the new law as the "second return" of Hong Kong, 25 years after the first return. Other reforms, of course, require continued work, ranging across education, media, internet, and, above all, in relation to economic matters. But it was this rule-of-law solution that is the most notable of all. As mentioned, it

completely blindsided those who sought to use Hong Kong SAR as a lever to destabilise China. Had they paid attention to the significant developments in socialist rule of law, and how governing the country according to the rule of law is a reality rather than merely an idea, they would not have been so surprised.

## 10.7 Conclusion: The Long Term

Given the international attention to developments in Hong Kong SAR, I have attempted to provide a somewhat comprehensive case study of how socialist rule of law is practised in China. This required an overview of Hong Kong's earlier history as an autocratically governed colony of the British Empire, delving into the long negotiation process leading to its overdue return to China in 1997 and the innovative policy of "one country, two systems," analysing the deep economic contradictions that had arisen during the first two decades as a special administrative region within China, and examining the "storm" that burst forth in 2019–2020. I gave particular attention to the rule-of-law solution via the Hong Kong National Security Law that was implemented at the beginning of 2021, since this law and its enactment is an excellent case study of how far socialist rule of law has developed in China. As China's Assistant Foreign Minister, Le Yucheng, observed on 16 April, 2021: "Hong Kong is governed in accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Basic Law of Hong Kong, not the laws of other countries."[9]

Apart from the immediate success of quelling the riots and beginning the process of reestablishing the stability and safety of Hong Kong SAR, what have been the outcomes of the National Security Law, as far as we can see a year or more after its implementation? I would like to address two main features, one with a political focus and the other economic. Regarding the former, all eyes were focused on two rounds of elections. The first was for local elections on 19 September, 2021, and the second for the seventh Hong Kong SAR Legislative Council, held on 19 December, 2021. The elections took place in light of the revised electoral policy, which was approved at the National People's Congress on March 2021 (NPC 2021; see also Wen 2021d). Elections would have three vectors: a widely representative Election Committee of 1500 members,[10] which would elect the Chief Executive and some delegates to the Legislative Council;

functional constituency elections, with representative from all sectors of society; and regional constituencies with direct election of candidates.[11] In vast contrast to the earlier turmoil, they proceeded peacefully and smoothly, electing 90 delegates out of 153 candidates to the Legislative Council. Apart from noting the broad representation from all sectors of society, the political inclusiveness of a range of political parties and platforms, and balanced participation, I would like to note how the emphasis was on competence and quality of candidates rather than the extreme antagonism of previous elections. This was a move towards de-politicised elections, as Marx had already suggested (1875a, 635; 1875b, 519–520). Such elections are more concerned with the expertise and experience of the candidates, and how their policies and proposals address people's lives and the development of Hong Kong SAR. Needless to say, this development—rather unique in a capitalist economic sub-system but more in line with Hong Kong SAR's position within socialist China—meant that anyone advocating secession, subversion, terrorism, or colluding with foreign powers was excluded (Yan and Li 2021). While in Hong Kong SAR, a specific Qualifications Committee ensures the suitability of candidates, the process itself is found in any political system so as to ensure that candidates are without dubious track records and commit to the well-being and improvement of the country in question. Has this led to a less representative electoral process? Not at all. As Carrie Lam (Lin Zheng Yue'e) points out (2021, 4), the process has actually improved the range and depth of participation and representation. With the elections concluded and the new Legislative Council sworn in by January of 2022, it was finally able to address a massive backlog of legislation. In this light, it has been observed that the elections "mark an important step forward in developing a democratic system that suits Hong Kong's reality and has Hong Kong characteristics" (Wu 2021).

In relation to economic matters, scholars and policy-makers have emphasised that a robust and consistent rule of law is an inescapable precondition for a stable business environment (Tian 2021). The "storm" of 2019–2020 had been a great challenge to such stability and the concern with measures following the National Security Law has been to ensure that Hong Kong SAR recovers and even develops further its pivotal economic role. But Hong Kong SAR cannot do so on its own, and it would not be able to do so if it returned to the warped oligopoly capitalism of earlier. Instead, the integrated and innovative move was to develop further the

“Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area [粤港奥大港区 *Yue-Gang-Ao dagangqu*].” With an initial *Framework Agreement* in 2017 and a *Development Plan* in 2019, the project took a new leap with through the recently announced 前海 *Qianhai* project (CPC Central Committee 2021) along with a host of associated projects as part of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan (Chen et al. 2021; Na and Li 2021a, 2021b). The purpose of this enhanced project that encompasses the Pearl River Delta and its hinterlands is to leverage the strengths of each region—whether trade, finance, innovation, high-tech, or service—so as to overcome the shortcomings of others. For Hong Kong SAR, this project seeks to deal with problems related to its singular industries, insufficient development space, and narrow channels for research and investment, by connecting with adjacent areas that can provide the answers. At the same time, the other regions can draw on the experience and insights from Hong Kong SAR’s financial and trade prowess (Wen 2021b; Zhang 2021). The result: not only do 70 percent of Hong Kong SAR’s residents approve of the new developments, but massive investment has also poured back into the region. In 2021, Hong Kong SAR returned to the top three locations of the world for finance, investment, and trade (Cheng 2021b; Wen 2021e; 2021f). Perhaps Carrie Lam, the former chief executive of Hong Kong SAR, can have the penultimate word: the purpose of the National Security Law, reformed electoral system, and the principle of “people who love the country should govern Hong Kong [爱国者治港 *aiguozhe zhigang*]” is “to develop the economy and improve people’s livelihood, to maintain Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability, and to develop democracy and achieve good governance in Hong Kong” (Lin 2021, 6).

By way of a footnote: the implications for Taiwan island should be obvious.[12] The whole process of “one country, two systems,” involving both Hong Kong SAR as a more challenging prospect and Macao SAR as a role model, is a world first. The road is new, but the experiences gained on the way, the wrong turns taken and the correct roads found, are providing invaluable truth from facts for the time when Taiwan island also returns to China.

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# Footnotes

1 While the total area covers 1,076 square kilometres, Hong Kong Island has 79.77 square kilometres, Kowloon has 11.7 and the New Territories 984.53 square kilometres.

2 The following material is based on a detailed endnote on pages 373–376 in the third volume of *The Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping*.

3 Although the translation is my own, I have added a citation to the English version for the sake of reference.

4 In the following material, I draw on a very widely read study by Cheng Enfu and Ren Chuanpu (2019), which was written *in media res* and thus responds to immediate developments with significant policy proposals.

5 I use the term “colour counter-revolution” deliberately, since they are by no means “revolutions.”.

6 In September of 2021, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a detailed list of acts of interference in Hong Kong SAR by the USA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021; see also Zhong 2021b).

7 爱国 *aiguo* is often translated as “patriotism” or “patriotic,” although the word literally means “love the country.” It is different from 民族主义 *minzuzhuyi*, or nationalism.

8 This process runs alongside already existing democratic practices relating to elections for people’s congresses and consultation through political consultative conferences, as well as significant grassroots governance.

9 This comment has been reported on many websites, but see the report by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjbxw_673019/202104/t20210418_9137927.shtml.

10 The new Election Committee includes National People’s Congress deputies, Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference members, Legislative Council members, university presidents,

business leaders, professionals, workers, grassroots associations, small and medium-sized enterprises, mainland Hong Kong people's organisations and other representatives (Yan and Li 2021).

11 Non-Chinese permanent residents, as well as residents from the mainland and Taiwan island, are also allowed to vote, and up to twenty percent of the Legislative Council may comprise such persons (Lin 2021, 4; Li H. 2022).

12 The interested reader should begin with the Chinese Taiwan website, in English at http://eng.taiwan.cn, and in Chinese at http://www.taiwan.cn.

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# 11. Party Building: Strengthening the Construction of a Marxist Party

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## 11.1 Opening Remarks

The final case study that arises from chapter eight concerns Party building, which is a key feature of effective leadership by the Communist Party. For a Party of almost 100 million members, the level of organisation for such an active Communist Party is beyond the imagination for those who live in countries with populations smaller than even the CPC. Building and strengthening the Party, improving its theoretical knowledge in Marxism, leading on all fronts, building honest and clean governance, ensuring deep links with the masses, engaging actively with and deeply involved in communities and workplaces—these and many more are the tasks and responsibilities of Party branches. The resources for these tasks are also immense, so I need to be selective.

In this chapter, my interest is in base-level or grassroots Party branches, since these are the foundation of the whole Party: "Attaching importance to and strengthening the construction of Party branches is the distinctive feature of a Marxist party" (Jizhe 2018).[1] The first part analyses in some detail the *Regulations for the Work of Branches of the Communist Party of China*, which was issued in trial form in 2018 and is currently undergoing comprehensive testing and the gathering of feedback from concrete experience. While providing an overview of the *Regulations*, I am

particularly interested in five topics: (a) the dialectical nature of Party branches, in the sense that resolute and unified adherence to the Central Committee is coupled with full-scale democratic practices, energy, and creativity; (b) the ten types of Party branches, which require some explanation and occasionally draws on personal experience; (c) the tasks and responsibilities of such branches, especially since the *Regulations* signalled a root-and-branch renewal of the base-level, the very foundations of the CPC; (d) comprehensive democratic practices, in terms of elections, consultation, and democratic supervision that has a "spicy taste"; (e) and the increased responsibilities of Party branch secretaries, which I leave for a separate section later in the chapter.

The second section of the chapter selects one type of grassroots Party branch out of a large number: the enterprise Party branch. I do so by drawing on the immense resources at the premier CPC site, 党建 *Dangjian*, which means "Party Building." After a brief overview of the site's content and structure, I begin by analysing some examples of branches in non-public enterprises, before turning to the comprehensive Marxist educational activities of grassroots branches in state-owned enterprises. Since the centenary of the CPC was celebrated on 1 July, 2021, the material I have researched primarily concerns historical study and activities in a number of different branches. The final topic of this section deals with the fact that the working masses—industrial workers, miners, railway employees, and so on—are the members of enterprise branches, and that a major responsibility concerns the well-being of the staff and working masses in the enterprise.

The third and fourth sections concern the Party branch secretary and the role of trade unions. The branch secretary is a major concern of the *Regulations*, but I have held the treatment to this point since there has been a distinct focus on improving the skills and qualities of such secretaries. After dealing with the *Regulations* on this matter, I turn to two insightful pieces, the first of which identifies the main problems that arose from appraisals of branch secretaries and the solutions in terms of identifying potential secretaries, nurturing and training them, and assisting branch secretaries in the many tasks of theoretical improvement, engagement with production and decision-making in the enterprise, and assisting branch members in all respects. The other study is an anonymous first-hand account of a new Party branch secretary and the challenging tasks of renewing and growing the branch. The final section of the chapter broaches

the topic of trade unions in a socialist system, especially since such a role is somewhat more difficult to understand for those who are accustomed to the antagonistic nature of class-based struggles in capitalist systems. Here, I draw on a key work report from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, which is a must-read text for all who are interested in the topic.

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## 11.2 Regulations for the Work of Party Branches

In 2018, an important trial document was made available by the CPC's organisation department, entitled *Regulations for the Work of Branches of the Communist Party of China* (2018). Although this text is the focus of discussion in this section, let me set the context. After the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012, but especially after the Nineteenth National Congress in 2017, a spate of new regulations were promulgated. All of them initially appeared in trial versions, to be implemented but also tested on the ground and subsequently revised into final form. For example, in June of 2015 a trial version of *Regulations for the Organisational Work of the Communist Party of China* was published.[2] It would take almost six years for the final version to be approved, in April of 2021. On the way, an enormous amount of engagement and feedback was produced so as to ensure that the final text reflected the well-considered contributions from all levels. Of course, the text will be revised later in light of further practice. Many other trial and—in some cases—final versions of regulations have appeared, relating to grassroots organisations of Party and state organs, grassroots organisations in state-owned enterprises, rural work and grassroots Party organisations in the countryside, elections in regional organisations, elections in grassroots Party organisations, United Front work, grassroots organisations in institutes of higher learning and Party schools, protecting the rights of Party members, the work of the Central Committee, organisational structure of the CPC, responsibilities of Party members, education of Party members, disclosure of Party affairs, Party building in PLA branches, and the Discipline Inspection Commission.

It is by no means possible to analyse all these texts since this would take me too far from the present task. Thus, my main analysis concerns the Party branch regulations (to my knowledge still in trial phase), but—where necessary—I will also draw on other material. While these are the first fully articulated regulations in this form in the history of the CPC, this does not

mean there was an absence of earlier guides and measures for Party building. A careful study by She Xiang (2019, 76–78) shows that the process began already at the CPC's Second National Congress in July of 1922 and has developed since that time. At the same time, there has been a renewed emphasis since the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012 on strengthening the construction of grassroots Party branches.[3] The process for developing the draft regulations under analysis here began in July of 2016, under the auspices of the CPC Central Committee's Organisation Department. Over the next two years there was an immense amount of in-depth investigation and extensive feedback. To give an idea of how extensive: there were more than 2.3 million characters filling theoretical and historical research materials, 40 research reports, 151 Party branch investigations, interviews with 861 Party branch secretaries, 30,000 questionnaires, and many, many expert discussions (Jizhe 2018).

The concerns of the regulations include strict self-governance, strengthening the Party's organisations and political functions, ensuring that the branches are the Party's bastions or strongholds in struggle, and consolidating the foundations of the Party's long-term role at the helm of the state. The trial document seeks to combine both "inheritance with innovation," thereby "passing on the valuable experience of constructing Party branches accumulated in the course of revolution, construction and reform." At the same time they need to be "problem-oriented and solution-focused," so as to deal with concrete issues that need to be addressed, while ensuring that they are in line with the "actual operational needs of base-level Party branches" (Jizhe 2018).

The *Regulations* contain eight chapters, beginning with general principles, and then focusing on organisational setup, basic tasks, working mechanisms, organisational life, Party branch committees and branch secretaries, leadership and safeguards, and finally supplements. In analysing this material, I will give more attention to items of interest for the theme of this book as a whole.

### 11.2.1 Dialectical Nature of Party Branches

At a theoretical level, the principles of Party branches (Article 3) reflect the very nature of Communist Parties.[4] There are five principles: (1) resolute adherence to the Marxist-Leninist tradition as it has developed in China, from Mao Zedong Thought to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism for a New

Era; (2) the role of and obedience to the Central Committee, with the General Secretary at the core; (3) the inescapable need to be deeply engaged with and immersed in the masses through the mass line; (4) democratic centralism as the nature of Party governance and the need for inner-Party democracy; (5) giving full play to the creativity and initiative of Party branch members. For those accustomed to either-or oppositions, these principles may seem like impossible combinations. How can obedience to the decisions of the Central Committee be coupled with the innovation and enthusiasm of Party branch members, or indeed the practice of inner-Party democracy? The key lies in the dialectic of democratic centralism, in which democracy is enhanced through centralism and centralism can function fully only with robust democratic practice. The obverse is that excessive and individualistic democracy leads to the authoritarianism of local leaders and branch secretaries. In short, this means that "democracy is controllable but not overflowing and disorderly," while "centralism is energetic but not rigid and arbitrary" (Huang 2019, 48). This is by no means the only time that Marxist dialectics is invoked. For example, in the important *Regulations for Safeguarding the Rights of Members of the Communist Party of China*, it is emphasised that Party members should correctly understand and implement the dialectical unity of rights and duties, and the exercise of rights must be premised on fulfilling obligations, assuming responsibilities, and abiding by discipline (CPC Central Committee 2020a).

The chapter on organisational setup stipulates the minimum (3) and maximum (50) number of members in a branch, the processes for establishing new Party branches, dissolving branches that are no longer functional, and adapting to changing circumstances. The last item is of interest, since it concerns the nature of Party branches in projects with a specified time limit such as construction projects in China and abroad (such as projects under the auspices of the BRI). In these cases, the project must last more than six months for a temporary branch to be established for the duration of the project. Further, where a branch has less than the minimum of three members, it should join with another branch, although no more than five small branches should do so.

### 11.2.2 Types of Party Branches

By the third chapter, we arrive at the main types of Party branches and overviews of their tasks. Here I will go into some more detail, partly for the

sake of explanation and partly due to the insights provided into the workings of Party branches.

1. Village Party branches (村党支部 *cun dangzhibu*):

The main tasks in these absolutely vital branches is to take the lead and be deeply involved in the rural revitalisation strategy (乡村振兴战略 *xiangcun zhenxing zhanlüe*),[5] which is now concerned with moving from the abolition of absolute poverty (achieved by the beginning of 2021) and focusing on the task of achieving common prosperity.[6] Notably, this involves an increased emphasis on developing the collective economy (集体经济 *jiti jingji*), not merely because village lands are collectively owned, but also because the decisions and economic benefits are collectively shared within the villages (Wang and Song 2021; Zhao 2022).[7] It also entails fostering village-level governance, in which the Party branch is involved but operates independently.

2. Community Party branches (社区党支部 *shequ dangzhibu*):

The communities in question are those in towns and cities, where one finds local clusters of people living in clearly demarcated areas. For a foreigner who has lived in and visited many such communities, they are like villages within the city. Shops, schools, medical facilities, and so on, are all found in the community, and the local administration deals with housing maintenance, services, and much more. The task of the Community Party branch is both to consolidate the Party's governance role and foster "base-level social governance [基层社会治理 *jiceng shehui zhili*]." Again, the two are not mutually exclusive but complement one another in terms of grassroots democracy. The Party branch in communities should be involved in all tasks relating to the community, and take the lead in integrating resources so as to improve the "well-being of the masses [群众福祉 *qunzhong fuzhi*]."

3. Party branches in state-owned and collective enterprises (国有企业和集体企业中的党支部 *guoyou qiye he jiti qiye zhong de dangzhibu*).

These types of branches are perhaps better known outside China, since the state-owned enterprises are the core drivers of China's economy, hubs of innovation, and a "pillar of strength" for the Party itself in following the socialist path (Xi 2016).[8] However, here the type of branch also includes collective enterprises. These types of enterprises may be in rural areas or regional cities focused primarily on agricultural production, or they may be cooperatives that have developed in larger centres. In all these cases, the Party branch's tasks include immersion in the productive role of the enterprise, participating in major decision-making where permitted, improving the workplace culture so as to strive for excellence, and ensuring the collaborative engagement of staff and workers.

4. Party branches in institutions of higher education (高校中的党支部 *gaoxiao zhong de dangzhibu*):

This type of branch I know best from personal experience. One finds them in schools and departments, with some—as in a School of Marxism—involving all teaching staff and being large branches, and others being smaller branches within the university's subdivisions. Given the importance of education in China's long tradition, the vital role of universal literacy and quality education in socialist countries, and the constant need to nurture generations of communist intellectuals, the CPC gives significant attention to educational institutions. The tasks of higher education Party branches mentioned in the *Regulations* include: ensuring that educational policy is implemented; that Marxism provides the framework for all teaching and research; that Marxist theoretical and political education is taught well across the higher education institution; and ensuring the completion of research and teaching tasks.[9] There is also an emphasis on students' ideals and beliefs (信心 *xinxin* with the connotations of confidence, belief, and faith in Marxism), and cultivating them through virtue.[10]

5. Party branches in non-public economic organisations (非公有制经济组织中的党支部 *fei gongyouzhi jingji zuzhi de dangzhibu*):

The reader will immediately note the terminology used here: literally "non-public [非公有制 *fei gongyouzhi*]" economic organisations. After a decade

or more of the reform and opening-up, more and more enterprises arose that were not state-owned.[11] But the term “private enterprise [私人企业 *siren qiye*]” is too narrow to encapsulate the many forms of non-state-owned enterprises. These include “privately run enterprises [私营企业 *siying qiye*],” “community-run enterprises [民营企业 *minying qiye*],” “community-run non-enterprise units [民办非企业单位 *minban fei qiye danwei*],” and so on. Hence the terminology of “non-public.” Party branches, of course, exist and have grown in these types of enterprises (Wang and Qi 2019) and are tasked with ensuring adherence to state laws concerning workplace practice, working democratically on the shop floor to ensure workers and staff move forward together, safeguarding the legitimate rights of all workers, and developing a workplace culture that ensures the success of the enterprise. Needless to say, these non-public economic organisations must also be part of the Five-Year Plans.

6. Party branches in social organisations (社会组织中的党支部 *shehui zuzhi zhong de dangzhibu*):

Social organisations are non-economic (in contrast to the previous type) and include the mass organisations with histories that go back to the period of revolutionary struggle, as well as the many social organisations that have arisen since that time. These organisations are yet another crucial point for Party branches to engage with the masses. This type of branch has a greater emphasis on developing political knowledge and identity through educational activities, fostering the engagement with social governance through grassroots democracy, and meeting the need for common or public responsibilities and services.

7. Party branches in public institutions (事业单位中的党支部 *shiye danwei zhong fe dangzhibu*):

Public institutions (事业单位 *shiye danwei*) are specific Chinese entities, which are service organisations focused on public welfare and engaged in education, science and technology, culture, health, sports, and so on. While funded by the government and established by state organs, they are distinct legal entities and not state organs themselves.[12] Party branches in public

institutions play a more overt leadership role, participating in discussions and making decisions on important issues. A major reason is that public institutions are talent-intensive and knowledge based, with direct influence on China's path of development.

8. Branches in all levels of Party and state organs (各级党和国家机关中的党支部 *geji dang he guojia jiguan zhong de dangzhibu*):

The category of state and government organs should be obvious: the many bodies that undertake state administration and exercise state power, such as the people's congresses at many levels, state council, judicial bodies, public security, and so on. But what are Party organs? These are the permanent bodies that operate under the auspices of the CPC. As one example among many, the CPC Central Committee has a whole department, with subdivisions, devoted to international diplomacy with Communist and Workers' Parties in other countries. In other words, where a person's full-time job is in a Party organ, then it follows that there will be a branch in that organ. The tasks of such branches include building teams of Party members, managing and supervising them, and assisting administrative heads in completing their tasks and improving their work style.[13]

9. Branches for mobile Party members (流动党员党支部 *liudong dangyuan dangzhibu*):

Mobile—literally circulating or "flowing [流动 *liudong*]"—Party members are those whose work takes them to different parts of the country, or even internationally, on a regular basis. Although this is a relatively new category of Party branch, the solution is quite straightforward: when such a member moves for a while to new area, the former branch where he or she was located will inform the new branch, so that the member in question can be attached to the nearest branch. To enable such a process, the framers of the regulations had in mind locations or organisations such as industrial or business parks, chambers of commerce, trade associations, administrative bodies in other parts of the country, and so on (Jizhe 2018). These would also function to assist with the mobile Party member keeping in touch with and being connected to Party branches. In these cases, careful attention

should be given to the mobile member's patterns of study, life organisation, and regular democratic evaluation. They are still expected to fulfil their duties, exercise their rights as a comrade, and give full play to their skills in contributing to the Party.

10. Branches for retired cadres and workers (离退休干部职工党支部 *lituiti ganbu zhigong dangzhibu*):

The final category, of retired comrades, not only witnesses to the sheer size of the CPC (since there a good many comrades who have retired from their work but are still comrades), but also to the reality that the contributions and involvement of such members differs according to capabilities. Where possible, retired members need to continue with study, participate in the organisational life of the Party, participate in discussions and planning, and contribute actively. On a personal note, I have met a few retired members who are still active in the Party. They can contribute from their wisdom and experience, and can undertake educational roles, take part in the process for assessing probationary members, and participate in events of interest to retried cadres. This is not to say that retired comrades are shunted away to a type of Party "retirement home," for the branch for retired members is very much integrated within the Party as a whole and subject to the district Party committee.

### 11.2.3 Tasks and Responsibilities

Although I have indicated the main tasks and responsibilities of these types of branches, there are also some core tasks common to all branches. These include resolutely following and implementing CPC decisions and policies, continuously studying of Marxism so as to improve the theoretical and practical abilities of comrades,[14] recruiting and training prospective Party members, abiding by rule of law when engaging with state organs, and putting forward proposals for improving Party building. Others include ensuring stability and harmony, improving work style, and enhancing the work of the enterprise, village, community, or organ.

At the same time, each type of Party branch has a main emphasis depending on its context. To quote:

> In the village and community Party branch, the emphasis is on the overall leadership of all kinds of organisations and work in the village and the community; for Party branches in state-owned enterprises and collectively owned enterprises, the emphasis is on participating in decision-making on major issues of the enterprises in accordance with regulations; for Party branches in higher education institutions, the emphasis is on strengthening ideological and political guidance and laying a solid foundation for students' ideals and beliefs; for Party branches in non-public economic organisations, emphasis should be placed on uniting and bringing together the staff and working masses to promote the healthy development of enterprises; for Party branches in social organisations, the emphasis is on educating and guiding the staff and working masses to enhance their political character; for Party branches in public institutions, emphasis should be placed on participating in important decision-making, fostering the growth of talents and promoting the development of undertakings; for Party branches in Party and state organs at all levels, the focus should be on working in service centres and team building; for Party branches of mobile Party members, emphasis should be placed on undertaking political study and leading a good organisational life; and for Party branches of retired cadres and workers, the emphasis is on guiding retired members to play a role in light of their own reality (Jizhe 2018).

Finally, the text constantly uses the terminology of the "masses [群众 *qunzhong*]," since it is precisely at the level of base-level Party branches that Party members are drawn from the masses and have the closest connection with such masses (see also Sect. 11.3.3). My overall impression from studying this material, along with personal experience with members of some of these Party branches, is that the CPC is deeply enmeshed with the common people and the masses. This is not, as some in Western countries are wont to misrepresent, an effort to "control" all levels of life; instead, the deep enmeshment with the masses of the people is a core feature of how any Communist Party should work.

### 11.2.4 The Organisational Life of Party Branches

The two middle chapters of the *Regulations* concern the working mechanisms and organisational life of the Party branch. Here I summarise the main points and then focus on the practices of inner-Party democracy. Party branches meet once per week, on a pattern of three branch meetings and one study session per month. Although daily interaction among comrades is the norm, the branch meetings form the backbone of its activities. Minutes are kept, local issues and projects are discussed, documents from the Central Committee and Regional Committee are studied, along with plans for future projects, supervision of existing projects, and assessment of completed projects. Any Communist Party member who has participated in branch meetings will be familiar with the approach. The specific issues may differ, but the mechanisms are the same.

Other Party structures are also stipulated in the *Regulations*, including the monthly plenary or general membership meeting (大会 *dahui*), the Party branch committee in larger branches, which also meets at least once per month, group meetings for branches with a scattered membership, and two important annual meetings: the "organisational life meeting [组织生活会 *zuzhi shenghuo hui*]" and the meeting for "democratic appraisal of Party members [民主评议党员 *minzhu pingyi dangyuan*]." These two processes may be joined in a single longer meeting. The organisational life meeting has three stages: "The principal focus of the organisational life meeting should be determined beforehand, through a process of careful study, heart-to-heart talk, and listening to opinion; the meeting itself should identify problems, engage in criticism and self-criticism, and clarify the direction of reform and rectification; after the meeting, measures for reform and rectification should be formulated and then implemented one by one" (CPC Central Committee 2018, Article 17). The democratic appraisal of Party members seeks to assess their Party character or spirit (党性 *dangxing*) in relation the Party oath and the expected standards of Party members. In particular, democratic appraisal takes place "according to the procedures of individual self-appraisal [自评 *ziping*], mutual appraisal [互评 *huping*], and democratic appraisal [民主测评 *minzhu ceping*]." Further, the "Party branch committee meeting or a general meeting of Party members shall, on the basis of the appraisal and the daily performance of Party members, put forward opinions on the appraisal" (CPC Central Committee 2018, Article 18).

### 11.2.5 Comprehensive Democratic Practices

The mention of democratic appraisal may raise a question for some readers: how is this democratic, and where is the voting? Let me address the question of elections and voting first. This should not be a mystery: voting on proposals and decisions is standard procedure in Party branches. Articles 11 and 21 of the *Regulations* also stipulate voting procedures for the monthly plenary meeting, which concern accepting probationary members, electing delegates to higher level Party congresses, establishing Party branch committees, electing branch secretaries and other posts, and so on. We also find specific regulations devoted to election procedures in base-level or grassroots Party organisations and for regional bodies such as Party congresses and committees, with careful stipulations as to the number of members present to qualify for a legitimate election, number of candidates in relation to posts to be filled, processes for electing delegates to committees and congresses, and the relations between direct and indirect elections (CPC Central Committee 2020b; 2020c; see also Jizhe 2021a).

However, democracy in a socialist system is far more than simply voting; it also includes democratic appraisal or supervision, consultation, and concern with the well-being of Party members. As we have seen, democratic appraisal involves "criticism and self-criticism [批评和自我批评 *piping he ziwo piping*]," or, in more detail, self-appraisal, mutual appraisal with another comrade, and overall criticism by all branch members. These practices of democratic supervision are also widely practised in the communities and work-places where branches operate (Liu 2020). In these situations, farmers, workers, and common people who are not Party members have the opportunity to appraise the work of the branch. As the saying has it, these meeting often have a "spicy flavour [辣味 *lawei*]" in which the Party branch members sweat as though eating a fiery bowl of chilli.

Consultation is an ingrained feature of socialist democracy in China, and it is also found in Party branches in their very mode of operation. A particular form is found in what is called "heart-to-heart talks [谈心谈话 *tanxin tanhua*]," by which is meant frank and sincere discussions in which one can trust that a comrade has one's own well-being in mind and is not seeking to put you in your place. Obviously, this requires practice and a working atmosphere in which honesty and forthrightness are the norm. To

quote: “A Party branch shall often carry out heart-to-heart talks … Heart-to-heart talks should be frank and sincere, seek to exchange ideas and opinions, and help comrades improve.” Further, Party branches need to “pay attention to analysing the ideological and psychological condition of Party members,” especially those who have “undergone major changes in their families, or encountered major difficulties, or have serious problems in their physical and mental health” (CPC Central Committee 2018, Article 19). These measures include careful work with Party members who have undergone disciplinary procedures and show adverse reactions.

For those accustomed to Western compartmentalising of various aspects of individual and social life, only elections would be seen as “democratic,” while the other two might be seen as “consulting” and “pastoral care” or “counselling.” By contrast, in the context of Communist Party branches, they are all aspects of democratic practice. From my own experience of such processes, they are among the most democratic of any that you will find anywhere in the world. Notably, these practices are safeguarded by a robust system of the rights of Party members (CPC Central Committee 2020a).

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## 11.3 Grassroots Enterprise Party Branches

In this section, I would like to deal with the concrete realities of one type of branch—the enterprise Party branch—in a little more detail. A major reason for doing so is that in previous chapters I have devoted some attention to the activities of industrial Party branches in the Soviet Union and the DPRK (Sects. 4.3.3, 4.4.2, 6.3.2, and 7.4.3).[15] My primary source is the central and major CPC site called 党建 *dangjian*, which simply means “Party building.”[16] Many are the subdivisions from the main page, whether important news, theory, publications, the journal *Dangjian*, study space, and so on. My concern is with one of those sub-pages, concerning the enterprise Party branch. As with other sub-pages, the material is limited to 250 items that have been collated and selected from sources across China concerning Party building. Even with these limitations, the items go back barely a year. Thus, they provide rolling snapshots—if I may put it that way—of the most recent emphases in Party building. A consideration of the section in a week or a month would provide yet another snapshot.

The enterprise Party branch is one type of base-level or grassroots branch (基层党支部 *jiceng dangzhibu*), which are described as the Party's stronghold or "bastion amidst grassroots social organisations and the foundation for all the Party's work and combat effectiveness [战斗力 *zhandouli*]" (CPC Central Committee 2021b, Article 13). The term "base-level" or "grassroots" is a catch-all term that includes a number of branch types, including enterprise, village, state organ, educational institution, scientific research institute, neighbourhood community, social organisation, base-level discipline inspection commission, and so on. In total, there are 4.6 million grassroots Party branches (Jizhe 2021a).

An overview of the "Enterprise Party Building [企业党建 *qiye dangjian*]" section reveals articles on both state-owned enterprises and non-public economic organisations (non-public enterprises, as they are also called). In the articles, some of the more topical themes that emerge include Party branch leadership in relation to the Winter Olympics of early 2022, assisting Shanghai deal with the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus outbreak in April of 2022, and Party history in the wake of the CPC's centenary in 2021. More abiding themes concern the role of Party branches in the continuing reform of enterprises so as to improve and enlarge their core role in the economy and become world-class enterprises, the improvement of technological self-sufficiency and green development, involvement in rural revitalisation, stories of everyday workers who are Party members (and thus role models), and Party building itself. Out of this collection, I would like to deal with three themes: non-public enterprises; educational practices; and everyday workers (working masses).

### 11.3.1 Non-public Enterprises

"Almost every week, enterprises take the initiative to come to the door and apply for the establishment of a Party organisation!" These are the words of the Party working committee secretary in Changsha High-Tech Zone, in Hunan Province (He 2022). The obvious question is why the management of a non-public enterprise would seek to establish a Party branch. The answer is that Party branch members in such enterprises typically take the lead in work teams and make significant contributions to management decisions. In the earlier days of such branches, the policy was to keep the branch separate from the enterprise's operations. While Party members would seek to play a vanguard role in the enterprise, the branch would deal

with branch matters, and the enterprise with business matters (Wang 2010). It was soon found that such an approach was by no means ideal, so the emphasis shifted to integrating the two. The result: Party branch members became increasingly became the backbone of production and business operations, with the converse effect of strengthening the Party branch. This also includes a role in enterprise decision-making.

As the article by He Yong (2022) indicates, this integration of the Party branch and the non-public enterprise saw a couple of other developments. First, branch members became involved in the well-being of the working masses, assisting in terms of emotional and psychological concerns, life needs, and ideological understanding. This approach also influenced the managements approach to workers, thereby developing a healthy soil for the whole enterprise to improve. We have already seen this dimension in the regulations for Party branches, but in that document the concern with well-being was focused on branch members. In the example of Changsha High-Tech Zone, the practice has been extended to all workers. The second feature is also a step forward from the regulations, which stipulated the need for branch groups where members were scattered geographically. In this case, we see the development of what may be called chain Party branches. Given that a High-Tech Zone has a large number of enterprises that are all related, the innovative step has been to connect the Party branches in the different enterprises through “industry chain Party committees” so as to produce a higher level of integration in the zone itself.

A comparable example in quite a different enterprise environment comes from Pingliang City in Gansu Province, which has developed a “red pilot industrial chain” among non-public economic organisations (Lu 2022). These include Pingliang Red Cattle (a distinctive breed), Jingning Apple, greenhouse vegetables, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and nine other enterprises primarily concerned with types of agricultural production. In this situation, the Party branches in these enterprises have been linked through specific Party committees and developed what is known as a “Party building alliance” across the enterprise chain. In both examples, the one high-tech and the other agricultural, the integration between Party branches and non-public enterprise chains strengthens both. As He Yong (2022) observes: “Practice shows that when Party building is solid, so also are the productive forces and motivating forces, and when it is strong, so also is competitiveness and creativity.”

### 11.3.2 The Red Gene: Party Branch Education

Many of the articles concerning enterprise branches deal with education activities for the members. What I find most significant about this material is that the educational activities concern workers, in railway construction, steel companies, energy enterprises, aerospace, tourism, and agriculture. I will return to this emphasis at the close of the section.

Most items refer to the education programs around the CPC's centenary, which took place on 1 July, 2021. Even with this specific concern, it is possible to discern a pattern: the sheer scale of the activities; the effort to target them for the specific industry in which workers are engaged; and the implications for the future. In terms of scale, I will give a couple of examples. China Tourism Group's Party committee oversaw 3,627 study sessions for grassroots branches, along with 129 specific activities, such as knowledge contests, speech contests, and short video competitions. Given the specialisation of the group, it organised more than 100 educational tours to more than 300 revolutionary red areas and education bases across the country. In the process, 63 state-owned enterprises were involved with nearly 100,000 people undertaking the educational tours (Mu 2022b). The examples could go on, such as activities for the 100,000 employees and cadres of China Eastern Airlines: 93 Party organisation reading classes, 360 special Party classes, 160 special promotion materials, 1,500 red education courses, "Youth Learning" online group classes—all for more than 600,000 people. Given the nature of the enterprise, every week it organised 1,000 flights carrying 100,000 passengers to red sites and 16 airports in old revolutionary base areas (Mu 2022c).

Other workplaces preferred less in terms of sit-down study and travel, and focused on active and appropriate engagement. For example, at Sinopec's Linfen Coalbed Methane Branch, they had a system of "topic learning + topic workshops + self-study + dialogue lecture." While there were educational classes and each Party member had some reading to undertake and make notes, activities included onsite visits to a local martyrs' cemetery and a local revolutionary base area, musical performance, speech contest, and a "fingertip classroom" with many resources on their phones (Guo 2022).

Different again were the activities organised among the 29 Party organisations in the state-owned enterprises of Tongren City, in the Wuling Mountains in the northeast of Guizhou Province (Xu 2022). This is an area

of many minority nationalities such as the Miao, Tujia, Dong, Gelao, and Man, who make up half of the total population. Apart from the necessary study sessions and reading, the fact that the area itself is an old revolutionary base meant that a range of other activities could be undertaken. These included “immersive style” red reading days, making the most of the material presence of revolutionary struggle, live explanations, and interactive experiences. The Qingming Festival (Tomb-sweeping Day) in commemoration of ancestors recalled the revolutionary martyrs, including those involved in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Virtual reality technology was deployed for phones and computers so that more than 5,000 local Party members could retrace the Long March, or read a daily column on Party history. Public cultural activities were also held, such as speech competitions and a performance by the famous and culturally significant Fanjingshan Song and Dance Troupe.

Obviously, the approach to educational activities varies depending on the nature of the enterprise and the type of employee, but I note again and again that they are so often tradespeople and workers, such as those in the China Railway Bridge Bureau, State Grid Binzhou Power Supply, Delong Iron and Steel Company (a non-public enterprise), Sinopec’s Linfen Coalbed Methane Branch, or China Huaneng Green Energy (Ge 2022; Gong 2022; Guo 2022; Li 2022; Li and Shu 2022). Each of the educational programs I have mentioned in this section—and they are merely representative of country-wide activities—gears the whole process to the specific context. These may involve finding inspiration from a history of doing a good job, improving output, ensuring 100% safety, and enhancing the enterprise, but they may also involve finding historical examples so as to spur on the need to deal with very concrete matters such as inadequate water supply, replacing or repairing dilapidated dwellings, building new schools, enabling remote villages to engage in selling their unique products online, or providing proper recreation and rest areas for retired workers and Party members. In fact, the items here are drawn from the report on Tongren City, which has only recently abolished absolute poverty in all its areas (Xu 2022).

### 11.3.3 Working Masses

As I have already mentioned, common terminology found throughout the material I am presenting here includes “masses [群众 *qunzhong*]” and “staff

and working masses [职工群众 *zhigong qunzhong*].” In the second term, it is both the managerial staff and workers who together constitute the masses. Indeed, a Party branch motto is “I do practical things for the masses [我为群众办实事 *wo wei qunzhong ban shishi*].” Of course, there is always a risk that such words become part of a stylised and expected vocabulary. But I have been struck time and again that the terminology is used quite carefully in the material studied for this chapter.

For example, a study concerning China Communications Group workers expressed concern that with the COVID-19 pandemic there were delays in paying wages and that they may become unemployed. The enterprise introduced two measures, which are called—literally—“keeping watch on the money bag [守好钱袋子 *shou hao qiandaizi*]” and “broadening the path of new employment [拓宽就业新路子 *tuokuan jiu ye xin luzi*].” These are enterprise-wide integrated digital platforms that cover industrial workers, information registration, labour service entry, attendance statistics, and wage settlement and payment. Further, the Party committee has been working hard at ensuring that workers have good living conditions. A model for such arrangements is the modern apartment compound in Hengji, Donguan, which includes a collective inspection office, accommodation, catering, health facilities, and entertainment. The community includes a workers’ canteen, shops, hairdresser, and a local hospital. There are also places for fitness activities, entertainment, reading, and psychological consultation. The living environment includes measures to improve green coverage so as to reduce dust and ensure that “workers enjoy a comfortable living environment” (Mu 2022d).

Another example concerns Anshan Iron and Steel Group, in Liaoning Province in the northeast, where the Party committee rolled up its sleeves and got to work on issues of concern for workers. These included the development of “smart mines” in which every item from heart rates of miners to earth displacement monitoring was integrated, streamlining on the job training and education, improving the working environment of underground control centres so as to include modern rest and eating facilities, ensuring the dust removal equipment in the blast furnace area was replaced so as to keep the air clear, removing snow in winter on the steep slopes of the accommodation community so that retired workers did not fall, and updating the system for recording shifts and payment by working

closely with the pay office. These may sound like mundane tasks, but they are issues that directly affect the daily lives of mining and industrial workers. Notably, it is the Party branches and the Party committee that took the initiative in all cases. In fact, a key task force was established “with the backbone made up of Party members so as to be the main force for giving full play to the exemplary and pioneering role of Party members and guide them to take the initiative to tackle key problems and promote the in-depth development of various types of work” (Mu 2022a).

The examples could go on, concerning miners, steel workers, railway workers, car industry workers, and so on. Of course, these fit the traditional image of the worker for Communist Parties, but it is important to note how involved and enmeshed the CPC is with such workers, who make up a significant part of the membership. Further, the reason why the items I have studied and presented here are posted on the *Party Building* website is that they seek to provide models and examples from which other Party branches and committees may gain inspiration and seek to emulate or even surpass in the well-known tradition of communist competition.

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## 11.4 The Party Branch Secretary

Although the *Regulations for the Work of Branches of the Communist Party of China* also contain a significant chapter on Party branch executives and Party branch secretaries (Sect. 11.2), I have held the treatment of this material until this point since I would like to elaborate somewhat on the enhanced roles and responsibilities of the branch secretary. In regard to Party branch executives, the *Regulations* stipulate that a branch with more than seven members should elect a executive, which has a term of office for five years in village and executives branches, and three years for all other branches. Detailed guidelines are provided for the election of such executives and their tasks.

As for the Party branch secretary, the position carries considerable responsibility and entails a significant workload. It is worth quoting the article concerning the qualities and expectations of a branch secretary:

> A Party branch secretary should possess good political character, ardently love Party work, have a specified level of policy theory, capabilities in organisation and coordination, and skill in mass work,

> be bold in taking on tasks, willing to contribute, take the lead in displaying a vanguard and exemplary role model, have high prestige among Party members and the masses, and generally should have more than one year of Party standing (CPC Central Committee 2018, Article 23).

Election to the position of Party branch secretary takes place at a plenary or general members meeting, although the election also needs to be approved by the regional Party committee. Where needed, a higher-level committee will appoint a branch secretary, and while some qualities of a branch secretary are common, others are specific to the type of branch. Given the particular skills and experience needed for a branch secretary, there is an emphasis on identifying those who would make good branch secretaries, on training procedures, and developing a reserve of quality secretaries who would be able to fill posts where needed. Of course, with responsibility comes accountability, so the regular supervision and evaluation of the branch secretaries is an obvious need.

In elaborating on the role of the Party branch secretary, I would like to discuss two insightful articles, the first concerning the increased skills and training required for grassroots branch secretaries in the new era, and the second an anonymous account of a new branch secretary in a small enterprise branch. The first article (Wen 2021) provides a more overall picture, beginning with the acknowledged limitations of many branch secretaries who had become used to the older way of doing their job. The limitations identified are: (1) insufficient theoretical understanding, in the sense that the political task of the Party branch secretary was seen as distinct from the enterprise's economic concerns; (2) lack of integration of Party building and the enterprise's production and management, which is obviously related to the preceding point; (3) low level of political theory, which is partly a problem arising from lack of time for adequate study, but may also be seen as a result of laxness concerning the importance of political theory in the wake of the "wild 90s"; (4) insufficient knowledge of and familiarity with the Party's structures, working mechanisms, and work style, leading to lack of confidence in Party building; (5) lack of initiative, which is partly due to the part-time nature of the role, but also because branch secretaries were moved to new posts too frequently, with the result that much of their time was spent becoming familiar with the new

environment. In sum, these points identify the main reasons why state-owned enterprise Party branches had over time become “weakened, diluted, deficient, and marginalised” within enterprises (Jizhe 2020b).

The article goes on to offer proposals for improving the skills and qualities of branch secretaries. They begin with proposing stricter and higher criteria for identifying, training, electing, and appointing branch secretaries, as well as clarity concerning discipline and dismissal. The qualities mentioned here accord with those in the *Regulations*, such as being competent in their convictions, politics, responsibility, ability, and conduct, but also include the courage to take on responsibilities, already have an outstanding track record, and—notably—do not bear grudges and are not afraid to offend where needed. Further requirements involve: the need for constant study to improve the level of theoretical and political knowledge, and indeed to set an example and encourage comrades under their care to do the same; continuous training on the job and honest assessments of difficulties faced; objective and fact-based “rewarding the good and punishing the bad”; the related focus on tolerating and correcting mistakes wherever possible; proper remuneration for branch secretaries, especially with increased workloads, and the need to find ways to relieve the pressure on those who are part-time; develop the necessary skills so that branch secretaries can engage competently with production and enterprise activities; and, finally, the quality branch secretary should also be a person who has the ability to show genuine care for comrades and other workers, and thereby gain their trust.

Of these proposals, it should be noted that there is a renewed drive for Party branch secretaries in state-owned enterprises to ensure that “Party leadership is integrated into all links of company governance, and Party organisations are embedded in company governance structures” (Jizhe 2020b). Indeed, major management decisions need to be reviewed by the Party branch and committee where there is more than one branch. We need to be careful here, for this is not a measure designed to replace the decisions of the enterprise’s directors or board of governors, since this must remain autonomous. Instead, it is the task of Branch secretaries to ensure adequate review and make suggestions through processes of full-scale consultation, while the final decision is up to the directors. By now it should be obvious why there has been a push to identify potential branch secretaries at an early stage, train them, and build up a reserve of competent secretaries. This

approach needs to be calibrated very carefully indeed, since there is always a risk that deeper involvement with production and management means that the branch secretary may become yet another person on the managerial staff. In this light, the emphasis should be on the position of secretary of the grassroots Party branch first and foremost.

The second (anonymous) text has been widely published on the internet and comprises five brief essays by a relatively new enterprise Party branch secretary in a small branch of five members (with one application for membership in the pipeline), although the branch itself does fall under the auspices of a regional Party committee.[17] These essays were written between 2015–2020, so they reflect at an immediate and personal level the changes underway. Some items are familiar, such as the need for assiduous group and individual study so as to improve theoretical and practical knowledge in Marxism, the need for clean and honest governance, the increasing integration with production and management (it is a railway enterprise), and concern for the practical needs of all of the working masses. All of these items include honest and robust assessments of this grassroots branch's shortcomings and how they should be improved.

Two items are worthy of more attention, the first of which concerns democratic evaluation. I have mentioned this process earlier, but here it takes place in the context of improvements in the physical environment—study, activity room, book corner, and other infrastructure—and elections, with an emphasis on strict process, data preservation, and division of labour among the elected members. The initial appraisal of comrades after the new branch secretary was elected to the position took place during an organisational life meeting, in which the "members one by one offered genuine self-criticism, and, in the spirit of 'the redder the face, the more the sweat [红红脸, 出出汗 *honghong lian*, *chuchu han*],' they carried out earnest and serious criticisms of one another that were designed to help." The purpose of such activity is significant: the process of open and earnest criticism seeks to bring about unified thinking, build consensus, improve feelings, and promote the Party's work. If I may add a personal observation: at about the same as this piece was written, I noticed among my colleagues who were Party members that criticism and self-criticism sessions were in the process of being restored to their central role in democratic appraisal. Many went through the nervous process of getting red-faced and sweating, with some struggling to come to terms with what they encountered. Others

adjusted to the arduous process and found it certainly enhanced openness and honesty among comrades.

The second point in these reflections concerns mass work. The author notes that only two of the members are also involved with mass organisations—群团 *quntuan* in brief, 群众性团体组织 *qunzhongxing tuanti zuzhi* in full—with the sense of groups and organisations with a mass character. Such organisations—country-wide there are 22 in all—include women's federations, trade unions, youth league committees, disabled persons' federations, literary and art federations, and science and technology associations. They have a deep history in China, going back to the revolutionary base areas before 1949 and are an inescapable feature of the CPC's enmeshment with the masses. The author notes that the branch's mass engagement is by no means sufficient, especially in terms of involvement with mass organisations. Although these mass organisations have leadership and organisation independent from the CPC, involvement of branch members is crucial. Lack of involvement for this branch has meant that the organisational structures of the local mass organisation are relatively weak and that it has met infrequently. Obviously, this lack needed to be addressed, with a conscious and carefully planned approach. How so? The process of Party building, organisation, work, and development would be integrated with that of the mass organisation. The reason is that the mass organisation is "the assistant and reserve army of the Party." A further and significant reason is that it is precisely through the mass organisations that engagement with other workers takes place, strengthening the protection of their rights and benefits, creating a better atmosphere in the their homes, and implementing further measures for their well-being.

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## 11.5 The Role of Trade Unions

This treatment of involvement by Party branch members in mass organisations brings me to the final question of trade unions in China, especially since the All-China Federation of Trade Unions is one of the core mass organisations. What is the role of trade unions in a socialist system? In capitalist countries, trade unions are at the forefront of antagonistic struggles with the capital-owning class (a somewhat literal translation of 资产阶级 *zichan jieji*). Communist Parties in capitalist countries have historically been deeply involved in trade unions and have waged class

struggle through that involvement. But what about socialist countries, or, rather, those on the socialist road, with a Communist Party in power? The topic requires a study on its own, but I would like to address the question through an important article that summarises the main emphases and work of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui 2022).

Apart from the ongoing process of improving and strengthening the theoretical and political education of workers in Marxism, I would like to emphasise a number of features from this article. First, it uses the term 劳动 *laodong*, which may be translated as "labourer." This is the more overarching term that includes many different types of work, which now number well over 300 in the constantly updated government register. The more specific 工人 *gongren* designates industrial workers of the type that I have been discussing in my treatment of the enterprise Party branch. That said, in light of the nature of trade unions, industrial workers (产业工人 *chanye gongren*) have a particular emphasis in this study: improving technical skills and thus the quality of careers (140 million have benefited by the end of 2021); enhancing ideals and convictions; and promoting the desire to take on responsibility and dare to innovate.

Second, over the last five years there has been an increased emphasis on model workers, model enterprises, and "crafts persons [工匠 *gongjiang*]." In the history of Communist Parties, this is by no means new, for they have always sought to identify role models to which other workers and enterprises should aspire. As history shows, however, the risk is that model workers are attributed with near superhuman feats that are impossible to emulate, or that so many workers become models that the category becomes somewhat meaningless. Notably, the renewed emphasis in China on model workers concerns common labourers going about their everyday tasks. It may be a safety inspector in a power grid, a solitary stationmaster on a railway line in the remote mountains, a young teacher working in a small village in the mountains, and so on (Jia 2022; Wen 2022). Further, the emphasis on the "crafts person," recalling the carefully honed skills and pioneering efforts of independent innovation of past eras, is part and parcel of filling in the very few gaps in China's complete industrial chain. More than filling gaps, the notion of the crafts person is also concerned with the wholesale innovation that is seeing China leap ahead in more and more areas. Third, great emphasis is placed on improving the quality of the

working environment, living conditions, and daily lives of labourers. As we have already seen, these tasks overlap significantly with the tasks of grassroots Party branches and Party committees, which includes the improvement of the cultural and spiritual (精神 *jingshen*) dimensions, with many a cultural centre and activity.

Finally, trade unions are concerned with safeguarding the rights of workers. Anyone involved in a trade union will immediately recognise this core role, but what does it mean in a socialist context? Workers need their rights at work protected, have a safe working environment, be paid on time and in accord with their labour (a socialist principle), and feel that they are gaining from the process of reform and economic development. These points are highly relevant, not merely in light of the now past period of the "wild 90s" when working conditions declined and there was greater job insecurity, but also today for "migrant workers"— 农民工 *nongmingong*, literally "farmer workers"—who come from the countryside to the cities, those who are overworked, and new workers. Protecting the legal rights and institutional guarantees of workers requires proactive measures, such as the comprehensive monitoring system throughout all of the many union branches so as to deal with the main concerns of workers: employment and reemployment, income distribution, social insurance, social assistance, labour security rights, and interests of workers in new forms of employment. In relation to rural migrant workers, we find that there has been a notable strengthening of measures to "protect their rights, improve their degree of organisation, carry out extensive legal publicity and public welfare legal services, participate in the winter campaign to eradicate wage arrears, promote the settlement of wage arrears, and help rural migrant workers secure their wages and benefits, so as to achieve stable employment and social integration" (Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui 2022, 6). Given that a significant number of trade union members, including those retired, were still living in poverty in 2017, the concerted and targeted action of trade unions lifted 5,498,700 poor working families registered with trade unions out of poverty, increasing their disposable income by 19.61%.

It is difficult to avoid being impressed by such achievements and concerns. I would like to conclude by considering the aim of promoting "harmonious labour relations [和谐劳动关系 *hexie laodong guanxi*]." From a broader perspective, this emphasis is part of the default non-

antagonistic contradictions of socialist systems, as well as the drive towards a harmonious society (see Sect. 9.2.4). In the more specific terms of labour relations, these have not always been particularly harmonious, and Chinese workers have a tradition of being vocal about conditions. The approach of trade unions is to tackle these issues directly, as I have noted in the previous paragraph. Comprehensive monitoring so as to protect workers' rights and institutional guarantees, preemptive work to prevent the contravening of such rights and taking strong measures when they have been contravened, advocating rigorous enforcement of China's strict labour laws (NPC 2018b), and ensuring that workers benefit in concrete and material terms from China's development—these are all measures designed to improve labour relations. To be noted here too is an emphasis on comprehensive consultation as a constitutive feature China's socialist democracy, and the robust processes of democratic supervision (Sect. 11.2.5) that should have a "spicy flavour [辣味 *lawei*]." Grassroots democratic participation by workers is an absolute must, since harmonious labour relations are never a given and must always be promoted (Liu 2020).

In sum, labour is an honour and duty, highly valued and respected. The task of "trade unions at all levels is to go deep into the grassroots and factory floors" (Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui 2022, 1) so as to protect the rights of labourers, enhance their skills and benefits from economic development, and ensure in full the quality of life of labouring families. Trade unions have a history in China of working towards these goals and where needed will take vigorous action where the goals have been contravened.

## 11.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to give an insight into the comprehensive process under way of strengthening Party building in the CPC. My primary concern has been with the base-level or grassroots Party branches, since these are both the most foundational and give the best insights into the whole process. On a more personal note, I have a deep interest in the local Party branch and in the role of the branch secretary, although I have—for the sake of space—considered only the enterprise or industrial branch. Many other types of branches could be studied, although I have indicated a distinct interest in the village Party branch and its role. What strikes me

again and again, through this research and through personal engagement in China, is how deeply engaged and enmeshed the Communist Party is with the many different types of working masses. It is truly comprehensive, or functions in "all respects [全面 *quanmian*]," from workplace concerns to retired cadres, from insisting on the rights of workers to quality of life at home, from a high level of Marxist knowledge to the practical concerns of socio-economic and cultural well-being.

Clearly, the responsibilities of a regular branch member are significant, but this is especially so for the Party branch secretary. On top of the demands expected of a part-time secretary who also has a job, family, and social network, the responsibilities and increased skills expected mean a heavy workload. The literature I have studied recognises this problem and suggests ways to ameliorate these expectations and pressures. At the same time, it should be no surprise that the Party branch secretary, and indeed the rank-and-file member of a branch, has a high level of social appreciation and respect.

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# Footnotes

1 As with a few articles cited in this chapter, this is written by an anonymous journalist from the *Xinhua* media group (or society), so it has been cited using the Chinese for “journalist [记者 *jizhe*]”.

2 The various regulations mentioned in this paragraph can be found at www.gov.cn.

3 One may also trace a concern with Party building in Xi Jinping's earlier reflections, from 1983 and 2005 (Xi 2007, 111; 2015, 86).

4 In each of the regulations, the preamble mentions: (1) the "four consciousnesses [四个意识 *si ge yishi*]," as in "political consciousness," "consciousness of the overall situation," "consciousness of the core," and "consciousness of alignment"; (2) the "four confidences [四个自信 *si ge zixin*]," as in confidence in the road, theory, system, and culture of the Party; (3) "two safeguards [维护 *weihu*]," meaning to safeguard the General Secretary as the core of the Central Committee and the whole Party, and to safeguard the authority and unified central leadership of the Central Committee.

5 The *National Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalisation* (国家乡村振兴战略规划 (2018–2022年) *Guojia xiangcun zhenxing zhanlüe guihua (2018–2022)*) was proposed in February of 2018 by the Office of the Central Leading Group for Rural Affairs, and approved by the CPC Central Committee at the end of May in the same year.

6 So important are the tasks of village Party branches in rural revitalisation, as well as being one of the CPC's main constituencies, that two further sets of regulations have been promulgated, relating to rural work and to rural grassroots organisations (CPC Central Committee 2019d; 2019e).

7 I can cite only some representative studies here, since the topic of village Party branches, their vital work in poverty alleviation, and the renewed emphasis on the collective economy requires a separate study.

8 The state-owned enterprise grassroots Party branch also has a distinct set of regulations (CPC Central Committee 2019c; see also Jizhe 2020a).

9 These tasks are part of the educational reforms begun when Hu Jintao was General Secretary of the CPC, and have been enhanced during Xi Jinping's tenure. These comprehensive reforms are aimed at ensuring that Marxism is the overarching framework for all teaching and research, and that Schools of Marxism are the nerve centres of universities. I have dealt with these matters is a couple of earlier publications (Boer 2021a; 2021b, 6). There are also specific regulations dealing with grassroots Party

organisations in institutions of higher education (CPC Central Committee 2021a; see also Jizhe 2021b).

10 The four character phrase used here is 立德树人 *lide shuren*, which is literally untranslatable. It means the cultivation of the young (树 *shu* means “tree”) through 德 *de*, a very ancient term in China that was central to the teaching of Confucius. Its semantic field includes virtue, moral behaviour, social ethics, cause, and so on. The frame is collective and social, through which the individual flourishes.

11 For example, in the special economic zone of Shenzhen an inspection tour by the city’s CPC’s Party Committee and Party School provided significant input into how Party branches should be developed in non-public enterprises (Zhonggong Shenzhenshi wei zuzhibu and Zhonggong Shenzhenshi wei dangxiao 2001).

12 They are subject to *The Civil Servant Law of the People’s Republic of China* (NPC 2018a), which was initially promulgated in 2005, with the most recent revision in 2018.

13 A separate set of regulations applies to grassroots Party organisations in Party and state organs (CPC Central Committee 2019a).

14 So important is the continuous education of Party members that a separate set of regulations applies to this practice (CPC Central Committee 2019b).

15 I also have a significant interest in village Party branches, but the scope of this topic requires a separate study.

16 The web address is www.dangjian.cn.

17 One may find the account at http://www.wenxm.cn/zongjie/587750.html and https://zlme.com/648593.html.

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# 12. Conclusion: Communism and the Common Good

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In this conclusion, I seek to draw together some of the key themes that have emerged in this study of the history and theory of socialist governance. These themes may be divided into two broad categories: those that constitute developments from the initial theoretical principles of Marx and especially Engels; and those that have been significant developments in light of concrete practice.

As mentioned in the Preface, I have been selective in my analysis, focusing on socialist countries that I know and have researched over the years. Apart from Marx and Engels, my concerns have been with the Soviet Union, the DPRK, and China. Many other specific locations, or case studies, may also be studied so as to round out the picture. That said, the Soviet Union and China do constitute two of the major countries in which socialist governance has experienced the most significant developments, while the DPRK provides a very useful test case since it is so often ignored in analysis.

## 12.1 Enmeshed Governance

One of the most significant principles that emerged from the rather extensive reflections by Engels on the state and the forms of socialist governance that may emerge is that of enmeshed governance. For Engels, the very definition of the state, as it had existed hitherto, is a "separated public power" that is alienated from and antagonistic towards society. By contrast, a public power within a socialist system would stand in the midst of society. The organs of governance would be very much part of society, and not alienated from society. For Engels, any such reality could not be called a "state" in terms of his definition. It is for this reason that I have preferred the terminology of socialist governance rather than socialist state. However, by the time the Bolsheviks began to see a realistic possibility of gaining power through a proletarian revolution, and especially after the October Revolution, they began to use terms such as "proletarian state," "socialist state," and "proletarian socialist state." It was Stalin who—perhaps realising what was at stake in re-appropriating the term "state"—pointed out that it was a qualitatively different state, never before seen in human history. While one may quibble about his use of terms, this statement is factually correct: it was an enmeshed state, and one cannot understand it if one uses the tired framework developed in light of the Western European form of the state, for which the odd term "nation state" has come to be used. In other words, the state-society distinction does not apply to socialist governance.

The detail of the reality of enmeshed governance emerged through my analysis of the Primary Party Organisations (PPOs) in the Soviet Union. Emerging in the early days after the October Revolution, the PPOs were not really consolidated until after the successful conclusion of the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War and the massive Party building exercise of the early 1920s. With large numbers of new members, many of them workers, the Party branches in industrial enterprises became intimately involved in what I have called consultative democracy on the factory floor. Such consultation was usually robust and highly critical of management, and at times—as with Zinoviev and his Leningrad base—some PPOs sided with an opposition figure. As they were carefully persuaded to rejoin the Party's mainstream, the PPOs became vital for the Party's engagement with industrial workers. The PPOs would propagate Central Committee policies, while at the same time providing invaluable feedback and proposals to the higher decision-making bodies. Throughout all of the tumultuous turns of

the 1920s and 1930s, the PPOs became one of the main manifestations of enmeshed governance in the Soviet Union.

In the chapter on the DPRK, I found a comparable process in the Chongsanri method in agriculture and the Taean method in industry. Developed in the early 1960s during comprehensive on-the-spot visits by the Korean Workers' Party leadership, they developed approaches tailored to the specific concerns of agricultural and industrial collective enterprises. While specific details differed, the underlying principle was the same: vocal, critical, and constructive proposals from the collective farmers and industrial workers provide invaluable advice from those who know first-hand what the work requires; strict implementation of the central leadership's decisions and plans, which had been developed in light of farmer and worker involvement. As with the PPOs in the Soviet Union, I framed this approach as a type of consultative democracy.

For the situation in China, a similar theme emerged in the chapter in Party building. In this case, I was concerned with the reforms dating from the CPC's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012, which was also the beginning of Xi Jinping's tenure as general secretary of the CPC. Apart from describing the main types of Party branches, their organisation and workings, and the enhanced roles of Party committees and especially Party branch secretaries, I focused on base-level or grassroots branches in both non-public and state-owned enterprises. Indeed, the reforms themselves devoted considerable attention to strengthening grassroots Party branches in all areas, since these branches are the backbone of the Communist Party. In terms of grassroots Party branches in enterprises, these are made up of industrial workers, who thereby have intimate connections with their fellow workers—the working masses. The strengthening of these branches entails continuous and assiduous study of Marxism-Leninism, clean and honest governance, clear electoral processes, democratic supervision with a "spicy taste," and concern for the well-being of comrades. While Party members were already known as exemplary workers on the shop-floor, there was also a renewed emphasis on being part of the process of enterprise decision making, working hard to ensure harmonious relations between staff and workers, seeking to improve the enterprise's overall innovation and performance, and—notably—concern for the material and cultural well-being of all workers. The final item takes distinct forms depending on the enterprise, whether workplace conditions, timely payment of wages, living

conditions, the status of retired workers, and psychological well-being. Through all of these activities by Party branches, it becomes abundantly clear that the Communist Party is deeply enmeshed within the masses of common people.

In each of these examples, it can be said that the state is in a very concrete sense withering away—as long as we understand the state in terms of separated public public power. Through being enmeshed within society, socialist governance is—as Engels already proposed—a public power that stands in the midst of society.

Other instances of consultative democracy can also be mentioned, such as the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland in the DPRK and its role in selecting candidates for elections to the Supreme People's Assembly, or the many levels of people's political consultative congresses in China, or the vital role of grassroots democratic practices in China, or the mass line that provides the foundations for all these activities. In regard to China, I have analysed these practices in more detail in my earlier work, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: a Guide for Foreigners* (2021).

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## 12.2 Depoliticised Governance

The second theme that emerged in my treatment of Marx and Engels begins with Marx's brief comments on depoliticised elections. These observations, made in response to Bakunin, would come to have enormous significance in the history of socialist governance. Marx points out that the economic foundation plays a crucial role, and that the political parties and actors that emerge from a capitalist system will inevitably express the inherent antagonisms of capitalist economic relations. Antagonistic politics is the result, with the whole system geared towards confrontation, political point-scoring, and destroying one's opponent. Obviously, this is the context in which a proletarian revolution gains traction, but what happens when we have a socialist economic system as the foundation and the concomitant non-antagonistic relations between classes? Depoliticised elections, and indeed depoliticised governance.

In one respect, the whole history of socialist governance may be seen as a gradual realisation of how this may work. To be sure, there were moments of antagonism, such as the ever-changing opposition groupings in the

Soviet Union of the 1920s, the purges of the late 1930s, or the disastrous and chaotic deviation of the “Cultural Revolution” in China in the later 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, we began to see stipulations for elections in terms of competence, experience, and merit. These emerged in the Soviet Union during the promotional campaigns of the later 1930s for an electoral system relating to the regional soviets and especially the Supreme Soviet. Although the final shape of these elections would entail a retreat from multi-candidate to single candidate elections, the principle of merit for office had been identified.

By the time we come to the maturing political system in China, it is very clear that competence for office is the prime criterion for being elected. My analysis of the reforms relating to Party branch secretaries in the CPC brought this to the surface. In these cases, the required competence or merit is comprehensive: theoretical knowledge of Marxism-Leninism; significant practical experience; clean and honest governance; ability to engage with decision-making processes where appropriate; nurturing Party branch members; fostering projects for the well-being of all workers and farmers in which the branch is located; and so on. Needless to say, the criterion of competence also requires regular democratic supervision, accountability, and training. For example, all who are elected to a higher position within the Party must undertake a course at one of the Party schools before taking up the new position. What applies to the Party branch secretary also applies to any delegate elected to a local people’s congress, and indeed to the higher levels, all the way to the National People’s Congress.

Thus far, I have written of depoliticised processes relating to elections, while the previous section dealt with specific features of consultative democracy. This leads to the dialectical point that socialist democracy entails the productive interaction of both electoral and consultative and electoral democracy. In my earlier work on socialism with Chinese characteristics, I wrote at some length on this dialectical relation, and also devoted detailed attention to grassroots democratic practices in many parts of China, so I do not need to restate that material here.

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## 12.3 Leadership of the Communist Party and Rule of Law

The most significant development since Marx and Engels concerns the leadership of the Communist Party and rule of law. These realities arose out actual practice and have become inescapable features of socialist governance. Historically, the leadership of the Communist Party became a reality in the very early days after the October Revolution in Russia. The initial efforts at coalition with the Socialist-Revolutionaries soon became unstuck, and the dire demands of the Counter-Revolutionary (Civil) War, as well as the internal struggles with factionalism of the 1920s, led to a situation where the Communist Party was the only political party in the Soviet Union. While this was not an approach developed in the DPRK and China, it did mean that far greater attention was given to the ways in which the Party was bound to the masses whom it sought to represent. The Communist Party was, after all, meant to be a Party initially of the industrial working class and then later of farmers. Whenever this necessary bond was weakened, as happened from time to time, the Party seriously risked losing its legitimacy.

The DPRK and China followed a somewhat different path. In both cases, the initial revolutionary struggle was as much about throwing off the yoke of colonial oppression as it was of liberating oppressed classes. In this respect, they recovered through direct experience a key point made by Marx and Engels concerning class struggle: the struggle against capitalist imperialism in colonised countries is a species of class struggle. Thus, anti-colonial struggles for national liberation required a united front of all political parties seeking to rid their countries of colonial occupiers. In Korea, it was Japanese colonialism, and in China it was a combination of European and Japanese colonial powers that had laid the country to waste for a century or more.

After liberation, the united front organisations continued, as did the political parties and indeed mass organisations involved in such fronts. In Korea, they were the Korean Social-Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party, along with the Workers' Party of Korea, while in China we have eight political parties alongside the Communist Party.[1] Further, there are many mass organisations involved, with 24 in the DPRK and 22 in China. In light of their common experience of anti-colonial struggle, it should be no surprise that the united front approach would continue in the political structures that emerged: the Democratic Front for the Reunification

of the Fatherland in Korea, and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in China.

While in earlier work I have stressed the mass line and the distinction between historical (revolutionary) and practical (governing) legitimacy, here I have emphasised the united-front nature of this approach, for it entails that the Communist Party exercises a leadership role in relation to the other political parties and indeed mass organisations. This situation does not so much complicate matters; rather, it ensures a whole other dimension of consultative democracy and democratic supervision of the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea and the Communist Party of China.

At the same time, the Party in question cannot simply issue decisions and expect everyone to obey. Such an approach would be profoundly counter-productive. Here we broach the question of rule of law. The first signal of an emerging rule of law may be seen with the 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union, which was the result of immense discussion, consultation, and re-drafting before it was finally promulgated. Why the effort? It was the first time a properly socialist constitution had been developed, based on the principles of the working masses as masters of the country, proactive rights for all citizens, freedom from exploitation, and the leadership of the Communist Party. It would not do simply to copy constitutions from other countries, especially capitalist countries that were and are founded on fundamentally different principles.

In relation to the DPRK, I tackled this question in relation to the very powerful State Affairs Commission (SAC), of which the current chair—Kim Jong Un—is also the president of the country. Contrary to many a caricature and misrepresentation by the usual suspects, the SAC and its chair is appointed by, subject to, and held accountable by the Supreme People's Assembly, which has its own chair and president. The reason for focusing on the SAC is that all its members are from the Workers' Party of Korea, so it functions as a microcosm of rule-of-law procedures. The point here is that the whole system of governing organs in the DPRK "regulates the order in which the state power is established and exercised" (Han 2016, 13). The key here is the regulation of the order of governance, the procedures through which the exercise of power must function, and thus the rule-of-law procedures for the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

With China, we have the most well-developed socialist rule of law. This has been a signature feature of Xi Jinping's tenure, although he inherited a

process well under way for three decades or more. Here we find the crucial role of a constantly updated constitution, along with an increasingly comprehensive legal system that functions according to socialist rule of law. Xi Jinping has not been afraid to insist that the Communist Party and its members are also very much subject to the constitution and the rule of law. Further, the last decade has been the period when democratic centralism for country-wide governance has been articulated in concrete practice. In the chapter concerning whole process people's democracy, I also noted the way in which China's long history of legal practice has been incorporated with the developing rule of law, with a focus on framing core socialist values and good or virtuous laws. The reason is that rule of law needs to be coupled with the rule of virtue. Finally, the sheer robustness of rule of law in China has been clearly demonstrated with the solution to the "Hong Kong storm" of 2019–2020 (see chapter 10). In response to the unrest that burst forth in light of long-standing economic, social, and political contradictions, the approach was to take the necessary time to develop the Hong Kong National Security Law. When promulgated, it rapidly returned Hong Kong SAR to the much-desired situation of stability, safety, and harmony, although there were no delusions that the systemic problems—economic, social, political, and educational—need longer term solutions. Notably, these reforms are to take place within the framework of rule of law.

## 12.4 Communism and the Common Good

The final topic to be addressed concerns the common good. This may seem like a somewhat abstract term and can be easily misunderstood in feel-good terms. To counter this misrepresentation, I would like to begin with another principle that derives from Marx and especially Engels: the purpose of socialist governance is to manage economic and social affairs for the true and beneficial interests of society, of everyone. As the chapters of the book unfolded, I noted how this emphasis appeared in the stipulations by Lenin concerning efficient management, in Korea in terms of the Chongsanri and Taean work methods, and implicitly in China through the case studies of Xinjiang and Party building. In these cases, the preferential policies for nationalities and Marxist human rights are manifestations of seeking the true and beneficial interests of society, as are the many tasks of Communist

Party branches in ensuring the comprehensive well-being of all workers, whether in the city or the countryside, in enterprises and villages.

The most obvious manifestation of this initial principle from Engels appears in the policy of common prosperity. While I framed this policy in terms of the core human right to socio-economic well-being, it may also be seen in light of the common good. To reprise the earlier points concerning common prosperity: we see this emphasis already with Marx and Engels in terms of liberating the productive forces so as enable a much higher standard of living for the masses. In the Soviet Union, the purpose of socialism was expressed as a "prosperous and cultured life for all," an expression embodied in the 1936 constitution. In the DPRK, in the face of immense difficulties and frequent setbacks, this continues to be at the core of the struggle for socialism. In China, we find Mao Zedong calling on the great Chinese masses to lift China out of its dire poverty, along with Deng Xiaoping pointing out that poor socialism is not socialism at all. Instead, socialism entails lifting everyone to a much higher level of prosperity. For the last decade, Xi Jinping has been emphasising that common prosperity is a core vision, and that the long-term project, to be achieved step by step, would really begin after overcoming absolute poverty. In sum, common prosperity has always been a major feature of the socialist road.

How does common prosperity relate to the common good? The answer to this question potentially requires many words, but I will restrict myself to four main points. First, it is embodied in "taking the people as centre [以人民为中心 *yi renmin wei zhongxin*]," or a "people-centred" approach that has been emphasised resolutely in China since Xi Jinping was elected as general secretary of the CPC in 2012. We found this emphasis also in the DPRK, especially since Kim Jong Un was elected as general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea in 2011. Embodied in the somewhat full phrase, "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism," it draws in the earlier *Juche* and *Songun* to emphasise that a "people-centred" approach would shape and form all of the policies pursued, with a particular focus on economic development.

Second, in China the common good draws upon both the Chinese tradition and Marxism in terms of the "two combinations." This phrase means that socialism with Chinese characteristics involves both the development of Marxism in light of China's concrete conditions and the reshaping, and indeed dialectical transformation (扬弃 *yangqi*), of China's

fine traditional culture in a Marxist framework. Many are the concepts I could draw from the Chinese tradition, but let me focus on one, 仁 *ren*. Often translated as "benevolence," a more literal and revealing translation is "two-person mindedness." To explain, the two parts of the character contain the character for person, 人 *ren*, and the number two, 二 *er*. Thus, their combination produces the sense of two-person mindedness (Sun 2014, 4). Given the ancient pedigree of the word, its semantic field is extraordinarily rich and is at the core of what it means to be human. It would take me too far afield to discuss the relation with other key concepts; instead, I would like to emphasise the inherent collective focus of the concept. As soon as one has a concern for another, one has a concern for many. But this is still to operate with the singular individual as the starting point: instead, the concept and practice of 仁 *ren* is that one begins with the social context, with the collective in which we exist.

It is a small step to the "common" within communism. I am less interested here in the belated effort to recover the Western sense of "the common" (precisely at a time when the last of these pre-capitalist commons are being appropriated) and more in the range of senses that "common" takes in Chinese. For example, 共赢 *gongying* is usually translated as "win–win," but the 共 *gong* character has the senses of common, together, share, in company, and so on. It is precisely 共 *gong* that is found in 共产主义 *gongchanzhuyi*, communism, with the 共产 *gongchan* literally indicating the common ownership of property and thus of the means of production. We may continue: common prosperity (共同富裕 *gongtong fuyu*) unites 共 *gong* with 同 *tong* to indicate what is shared, held in common; 共同体 *gongtongti*, community, was coined to translate the German words *Gemeinschaft* and *Gemeinwesen* in Marx and Engels. In this case, a standard distinction in Chinese Marxism is between the "illusory community" of capitalism, in which human relations are mediated by things, and the "real community" of communism. Finally, a closely related character is 公 *gōng*, with a different tone than 共 *gòng* but with a cognate meaning in the realm of collective, public, and thus what is fair and just. While the ancient phrase from the *Book of Rights* speaks of the age of great harmony or togetherness (大同 *datong*) in terms of "all under heaven as common [天下为公]," and thus the "whole world as one community," we find in more recent times the expression "build the Party to serve common

interests [立党为公 *lidang weigong*],” which means nothing less than serving the interests of the people.

To give a recent and everyday example of how the “two combinations” work, drawing together two-person mindedness and the common good: during the COVID-19 pandemic a clear difference emerged between countries that espouse a decaying Western liberal emphasis on the private individual and the approach in China. For many in the few Western countries of the world, the whole exercise of pandemic control—however halfhearted and ineffective it was in those countries—was seen as a profound infringement of the individual choice to do what he or she wanted, irrespective of others. Indeed, in not a few such countries nearly all of the measures were “recommendations,” and if there were a few compulsory measures, they were hardly ever enforced. By contrast, in socialist countries like China, the sense was always that my temporary discomfort and inconvenience is for the sake of the well-being of everyone else in the community. Many were the disruptions to daily life, work, schooling, and economic activity, but the overriding concern for communal well-being came first. If there was frustration and criticism, it was directed at occasional inefficiencies in the provision of daily necessities and indeed at lapses in comprehensive and effective pandemic measures themselves. Actually, this concern with the social or common good was not restricted to socialist countries, for this sense of two-person mindedness is also manifested in cultures—for example, in the Pacific, Africa, and in Asian cultures influenced by Confucianism—where a strong sense of communal responsibility and the well-being of all remains paramount.

A third feature of the common good appears with the sense of unity in diversity, or, in terms of dialectical materialism, the “unity of opposites [对立统一 *duili tongyi*]” that was famously articulated in light of the Chinese tradition by Mao Zedong in “On Contradiction” (1937a; 1937b). In the Soviet Union, this dialectical principle bore practical results in the emphasis on class as the unifying factor in relation to the many nationalities, with the result that it was precisely this emphasis on class that led to an enhanced ability to develop the diversity of preferential policies for minority nationalities. In China, unity in diversity is a fundamental principal of Chinese life, all the way from food to governing the country as a whole, so much so that I cannot hope to do justice to its full meaning here. Suffice to recall the treatment of preferential policies for minority nationalities in

China (see Sect. 8.4), which are understood in terms of the unity of the country through the diversity of China's 56 nationalities. Similarly, the "one country, two systems" approach in relation to Hong Kong SAR (chapter 9), as well as Macao SAR and Taiwan island, enables the capitalist enclaves of the special administrative regions to continue for some time within the overall unity of a socialist country. Internationally, unity in diversity, and indeed the unity of opposites through struggle, underlies Chinese diplomacy. And we see it also with the policy of "ecological civilisation [生态文明 *shengtai wenming*]," which entails a living organism's habits, modes of life and inescapable relation to its environment.

A final question: how do we assess the relative merits and strengths of different types of governance and democracy? Here I reprise an observation from a previous chapter:

> The evaluation as to whether a country's political system is democratic and effective depends mainly on whether the country's leadership can be replaced in an orderly manner and according to law, whether all the people can manage state and social affairs, as well as economic and cultural undertakings, according to law, whether the masses can voice their interests without impediment, whether all sectors of society can participate effectively in a country's political life, and whether a country's decision-making can become more scientific [科学化 *kexuehua*] and more democratic [民主化 *minzhuhua*]. It depends on whether all types of talents can enter the country's leadership and governing system through fair competition, whether the ruling party can realise the leadership of state affairs in accordance with the constitution and legal provisions, and whether the use of power can be effectively restricted and supervised (Xi 2022, 4).

This study has attempted to show that socialist democracy, and indeed the whole system of socialist governance as it has developed for more than a century, is by now more robust and superior to any form of governance that has appeared hitherto in human history. Of course, socialist governance is by no means fully achieved or a given; it remains a work in progress. Let me put it this way, quoting a common saying: "forget not your original desire, keep the mission firmly in mind [不忘初心, 牢记使命]" (Xi 2017,

5). The original desire and mission are, of course, one and the same: communism.

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# Footnotes

1 The eight parties are: Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang (81,000 members); China Democratic League (181,000 members), China National Democratic Construction Association (108,000 members); China Association for Promoting Democracy (103,000 members); Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party (99,000 members); China Zhi Gong Party (28,000 members); Jiusan Society (105,000 members); and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (2,100 members).